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# ENDS *ARE* MEANS

*A Critique of Social Values*

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*With an Introduction by*

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of Mr Huxley's philosophy, such as will be found in the following pages, is to be regarded not merely as an inquiry into the work of a "solitary thinker" but as an attempt to elucidate some of the intellectual errors and confusions of our time.

Those who have read *Ends and Means* may be surprised to find in this book no reference to Mr Huxley's discussion of such topics as sex and education. The omission is deliberate. It is common ground to Mr Huxley and his critics that the danger of war constitutes the most urgent problem, and that we cannot hope for any radical reform unless a long period of peace is assured. Hence I have thought it best to concentrate on this problem; on the methods proposed by Mr Huxley for dealing with it and for bringing about large-scale social changes in general; and on the fundamental beliefs concerning society and the world which govern Mr Huxley's approach to these and other issues. The quotations have of necessity been removed from their context, but I trust the reader will agree that they have not been used unfairly or in a manner inconsistent with the "spirit" and meaning of Mr Huxley's synthesis as a whole.

Part II contains an outline of a philosophical synthesis that is available to us, that starts from very different premises from those of Mr Huxley, accords with all the generally accepted facts and is alone capable of reconciling the exigencies of scientific thought with our longings for a better and kindlier world.

K. S. S.



# INTRODUCTION

AT no previous epoch in human history has the possibility of war pressed so closely on such a large section of humanity as to-day, nor its consequences been so universally feared. The scale and the intensity of modern weapons of destruction have thrown into relief the dangerously unstable situation into which the whole of Western Europe has rapidly passed. With this has come also a sudden appreciation of the fact that many of our most cherished possessions are already slipping from us—our liberties, our moral standards, our cultural inheritance, and even our hopes for the future. Sensitive men and women, alarmed at the rapid deterioration that has set in, overwhelmed by its immensity, are groping feverishly in all directions for a way out; not simply a means of personal escape, but a practical way to social salvation for a distracted people.

What is remarkable about this situation is the inadequacy of our appreciation of the underlying causes, when compared with our detailed knowledge of physical science; the fact that any amateur, whether he be politician or philosopher, may presume, without being accused of presumption, to offer his particular nostrum as the solution to a complex situation. If it were true that science emerges out of a human craving for explanation, as Aldous Huxley seems to suggest, then it is little short of a miracle that that craving should have been directed to such matters as Cosmic Rays and the Quantum Theory—affairs of relatively trivial importance to the ordinary person—

while the economic collapse in the West and the drift to war should have been so far neglected as to present the appearance of a mysterious disease.

Not that it has come without warning. Already in the middle of the nineteenth century analysts of the economic basis of Western capitalism had foreseen the *impasse* to which it was bound to lead, and the general nature of the group struggles that would ensue. In pre-war Europe the alarm bell was already sounding, with its periodic crises, its repeated booms and slumps. By 1914-18 it had reached its first great crisis, the crucial point of change. Mass unemployment, mass malnutrition, booms and slumps and stock-exchange panics followed each other in ever-increasing severity; highly rationalised and scientific industry side by side with economy campaigns and literal starvation. Panic-stricken governments, unable to understand the direction in which society was changing, plunged this way and that for safety and security. Europe slid into a period of wars and revolutions. International trade diminished to incredibly small proportions. Where the strain was economically most severe there were the possibilities of complaint most severely curtailed. The rights of the working class to industrial and co-operative organisation were destroyed and the democratic liberties of the people trodden under heel by fascist dictatorships. The standard of life in Europe sank steadily. Industry that could not function to feed, clothe, and shelter its poverty-stricken population, suddenly began once more to spring into activity. Bombing machines, high-explosive shells, incendiary bombs, machine guns, poison gas, anti-aircraft guns, submarines, depth charges, torpedoes, and all the paraphernalia of modern destructive insanity are now turned out in

frenzied haste. The armament-mongers and industries harnessed to them rake in their profits at last, while in China, Abyssinia, Spain, millions of innocent people are burnt and shattered, the victims of fascist groups manœuvring for position in the death-struggle for mines, oil, and markets. The only step on which the contending capitalist Powers are agreed is the ruthless suppression of all workers' opposition, and of all rising democracies.

"A spectre is haunting Europe" wrote two scientific socialists \* nearly one hundred years ago, "the spectre of Communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: Pope and Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German Police Spies. Where is the party in opposition that has not been decried as communistic by its opponents in power? Where is the opposition that has not hurled back the branding reproach of Communism against the more advanced opposition parties?" And so to-day; Labourites, Liberals, Pacifists, even Douglas Creditors—all who dare to suggest that the drift towards international slaughter is not an urgent necessity—are swept by fascists into the one category, dangerous radicals, to be exterminated when the warlike situation justifies it. For if recent events establish anything, they prove conclusively that fascism means war, that war preparations intensify fascism, and that the drive to war and to fascism arouse in decent people a feeling of revulsion that sets them groping for a way out. They will become the spectre that is haunting Europe.

The interregnum between economic instability and wholesale destruction does not pass through an ethical vacuum. Public morality has sunk to a lower ebb

\* *Marx and Engels.*

than at any period in the memory of living man. Oppression proceeds not quietly and unobtrusively, as if the perpetrators were morally ashamed of their deeds, but by public pronouncement and by legal enactment. Jews, Catholics, Liberals, Pacifists, Socialists and Communists, are imprisoned and beaten to death. National minorities are denied human rights, denied the wherewithal to live, and courageous individuals who have dared to raise their voices in protest are imprisoned and subjected to tortures that only modern man could devise. Waves of *emigrés* flee from their homelands only to be sent back at the frontiers to imprisonment in concentration camps, and to lingering death. The world becomes full of wandering souls seeking a resting-place from misery and oppression. Homeless children have begun to drift helplessly about a maddened world. Not content with the practical perversion of science, by directing its knowledge to the production of mass murder, efforts are made to poison it at its fountain-head by the invention of new theories of racial inferiority. Science is turned to justify the newly invented superman, the Aryan, whose historic function it is to eliminate the so-called morally, physically, and mentally inferior Jew—and the decadent Boys of the Bulldog Breed. The custodians of public morality for the most part stand speechless in this welter of blood, murder, torture, cruelty, rape, lying, deceit, impotent because in the face of a wholesale social change they have no approach except through individual and personal exhortation. They work at the wrong level. Restricted by their personal and subjective approach, they remain blind to the objective group changes that are occurring, and so cannot re-form themselves to exert the appropriate group pressure.

In such a situation almost any philosophy will find its appeal echoed, for during mental and moral confusion individuals are moving in all directions. Only a thoroughly scientific and objective analysis will expose the general direction in which these individuals, albeit unconsciously, are being driven. Only those conscious of the direction in which the underlying forces of change are driving mankind, will be able to help steer it in a way that befits intelligent civilised human beings. Science—that is, knowledge, the Science of Social Change—must be applied, not simply in abstract explanation, but as a guide to social action. For here is stark reality, and scientists have always dealt with reality, have drawn their inspiration from it, have exposed its modes of change by practical experimentation and by using it for fashioning new forms of reality. Scientists have attuned their minds and their thinking to it, so that their theories, and their modes of explanation, fit step by step to the material changes that occur in nature. So to-day the social laboratory is crowded with incident, and the science of its treatment must emerge in the heat of experimental social action. The common man and woman are the experimenters, and they have by united group action to find the ways and means, and to devise the detailed theory that will lead them towards the necessary transformation of society. Their great task is to fashion this new society.

On matters such as these, unfortunately, Aldous Huxley cannot help us. He begins wrongly. He falsifies the scientific method. He imagines that scientific men possess a way of thinking independently of the physical world. “All science is based on an act of faith,” he tells us, “faith in the validity of the mind’s processes, faith in the ultimate explicability

of the world, faith that the laws of thought are the laws of things.”

Only a person isolated from the world of science, inexperienced in the continuous interplay of thinking and doing, of theorising and of experimenting, that is the essence of the scientific process could isolate in this static way the laws of thought and the laws of things, its ultimate explicability from its immediate rationale, its immediate rationale from the constructive and creative activities of man. The fact of that isolation forces him therefore to invent an act of faith, and to make it basic in science. There is no act of faith but a sense of expectation aroused by man's control over nature. Huxley finds himself driven to do this because he has made a false isolation; he has forced in an abstract way his “laws of thinking” on to “the laws of things.” Failing to test his theory of science against the practice of science, failing to adjust his thinking to its practice, he creates a mysterious act of faith, and so the door is now wide open for an irrational analysis of the world of social change. “There seems to be no reason why, having swallowed this camel,” he goes on, “we should not now swallow another, no larger really than the first . . .” and we have now broken loose finally from any hope of an objective understanding of the real world of brutality and rapine. It follows that the views of Aldous Huxley must thereafter be placed among the museum of other irrational manifestations of this decadent period, the slipping into mysticism, the escape from reality.

When the history of this period is written, and men can once again examine in tolerant amusement the confusions into which they blundered, there will be an interesting tale to be told of the manifold ways

in which men attempted to escape the urgency of the immediate issues. Whether they did this consciously or not, the fact will remain that they did try to do so. Pure mathematicians pass to greater and greater degrees of abstraction, asserting that their work need and does not make any contact whatsoever with the world of physical reality. They remain for the most part blissfully ignorant of the social history and origins of their own subject. To themselves their mathematics is the creation of their own unrestricted imagination. Others—mathematical physicists—assert that their analysis shows the universe to be a mere symbol in the mind of man or of God. There are no laws, its regularities are only apparent, vast accidental groupings of uncertain atomic behaviour, again freely brought together by the activity of mind. The vision of humanity on the cross disappears amid a flicker of jostling electrons.

The less imaginative have their own way. Science can succeed only where bias and prejudice are banished, it is insisted. Social injustice, war, international slaughter all involve politics, and political issues are steeped in prejudice. "Wait," they say, "wait until the facts have been collected, and these matters can be treated in the proper spirit." There is no waiting in social science, unfortunately. The passage of history cannot be held up, for we, including those who speak thus, are busy building the history of the future. We had better recognise that we must turn now, consciously, to its study and its practice; or we may find that we have merely accentuated an already unbearable situation. Whether or not the bombs are already falling on London, international war has broken loose in its own way, and the younger generation of scientific workers are already being



drafted to their positions in the war research factories. There is no standing aloof in a state of generalised confusion, and to each the ethical and the scientific issue has already been raised in urgent form. Man cannot live by Yoga: he might survive international slaughter if he knows why it arises, whither it is driving and how it can be controlled. His is a problem of immediate practice, not one of abstract theory for the solution of which infinite time is available. His is not a personal problem; its solution depends on the activities of others. It demands group action.

Others seek to escape into words. We cannot even begin to discuss these problems, they maintain, until we have devised a language freed from terms that have no operational meaning. We cannot discover whether the questions we are asking are not, after all, mere verbal confusions; and the way to success is to sit down quietly and argue out the structure of our ideal language. Here again we have escape. World war will not wait until schools of philosophy have decided whether there can be a language in which we can discuss whether there is a problem in the modern world. The rape of Abyssinia and the slaughter at Guernica are not verbal confusions. They are stark realities, the outcome of objective processes, made by men. Because they are made by men, they can be resolved in human practice.

Most University teachers to-day are well aware of the fact that students divide themselves broadly into two classes: those who are so preoccupied with the gathering tenseness of the political situation that they tend to throw themselves with all their efforts into political action to the detriment of their professional studies, and those who, having lost faith in the future, obsessed with the insecurity of the present,



lose their driving force. We may talk to them as our fathers did in a more settled period, of the progress of man, of extending the boundaries of knowledge, of slowly and steadily improving the lot of suffering humanity, of the ethical and spiritual value of education, but to them these have become hollow phrases. They have become hollow phrases in society also, for they correspond to nothing discernible in the present situation. In short, we have given youth no theories that illuminate the practice of to-day, for to do so would have been to expose the logical consequences of the structure of modern society. It would have meant turning the searchlight of science on communal organisation. When we are no longer able to hide the inconsistency between what we have preached and what has emerged, we turn these men loose on society, bewildered, without a working scientific principle, to become the easy prey to fascist reaction or to irrational introspection. The one direction leads irresistibly to an intensification of present-day barbarism, the other not only tolerates it by seeking a personal escape, but stimulates it by providing a mystical unscientific atmosphere within which it may breed. Aldous Huxley, in his fictitious arguments in *Ends and Means* that science falsifies reality, adds his voice to those who would prevent us from dealing with this emergency by an informed socially scientific outlook, interlocked with direct and immediate political practice, and on a scale commensurate with the forces of reaction that have to be overcome. It is because Mr Shelvankar in this book seeks to nullify the damage done by Mr Huxley that I have added these words. It is an important task.

H. LEVY.



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## PART I

*Je trouve l'attitude d'un Lenine risquant sa vie et l'infamie ou les malédictions pour arracher à leur enfer des millions d'opprimés non seulement plus virile, mais même plus véritablement aimante et conforme à la loi intérieure du sacrifice pour le service de l'humanité que les non-violents, quiètemment installés dans leur passivité et protestant négligemment du bout des lèvres, sans compromettre rien de leur bonne situation bourgeoise.*

ROMAIN ROLLAND.



## PART I

### I

#### *What It Is All About*

MR HUXLEY is distressed at the state of the world to-day and has, rightly, conceived it his duty to put forward his views on how an improvement could be effected. In *Ends and Means* he has worked out a number of "practical recipes", as he calls them, and he suggests that if they were widely adopted, humanity would have moved appreciably nearer to the Golden Age.

Before we proceed to examine some of these recipes and the philosophy out of which they have been evolved, it may not be useless to give a brief *résumé* of the book,<sup>1</sup> chapter by chapter, so as to introduce its main themes and acquaint the reader with the scope and nature of the argument.

In the first chapter, Mr Huxley elaborates his basic premise, viz., that "there is and for long has been a very general agreement" about the ideal goal of human effort, but "not so with regard to the roads which lead to that goal". This may seem an extraordinary statement, in view of the manifest differences between the ends for which such representative men as, for instance, Mussolini and Haile Selassie, Gandhi and Hitler, Stalin and Chamberlain and Roosevelt, Chiang-Kai-Shek and Mao-Tsung and the Mikado, and all the others are respectively striving, but it is the foundation

<sup>1</sup> It must be emphasised that no attempt is made in this chapter to summarise or condense the whole of the material contained in *Ends and Means*.

of Mr Huxley's thought. He insists that "everyone has his own patent medicine guaranteed to cure the ills of humanity"—the diagnosis of those ills being presumably the same in every case.

In his second chapter, Mr Huxley points out "that the world would be a mere chaos, an unconnected series of mutually irrelevant phenomena", and that we should find it almost impossible to think, unless we were always trying to reduce its diversity to identity, *i.e.*, unless we constantly sought for an explanation. He is chiefly intent, however, on warning us against "over-simplification" in terms of "such entities" as economics, sex or the inferiority complex—forgetting, apparently, that his own basic premise, as stated in the first chapter, and the emphatic assertion that "our metaphysical beliefs are the finally determining factor in all our actions", are particularly sweeping, not to say specious, over-simplifications.

The supremacy of metaphysical beliefs is nevertheless undermined in the next chapter, where Mr Huxley deals with history, and reminds us that behaviour- and thought-patterns have assumed different forms in different societies. So long as they remain intact "they are regarded as necessary, natural, right and inherent in the scheme of things. . . . But a time comes when, under the pressure of changing circumstances, these long-standing associations fall apart and give place to others which in due course come to seem no less natural, necessary and right than the old." What seems necessary, natural and right—which of course is another name for our metaphysical beliefs—is accordingly determined by the "pressure of changing circumstances". "An Englishman's ethical standards vary as he moves from England to India." Should not, then, Mr Huxley hold that latitude and longitude, and



an inexplicable "pressure", not metaphysical beliefs, determine what we do?

The fourth chapter embodies Mr Huxley's theory of violence—which we must discuss separately—and the fifth deals with "Planning". The errors and confusions in this chapter—too numerous to be detailed in the space at our disposal—are rooted in Mr Huxley's indifference to the fact that the prevailing economic system, outside the Soviet Union, is essentially competitive and based on the private ownership of the means of production. This involves him in the rather quaint belief that "planning" has taken different forms in the fascist states, in the Soviet Union and in democratic countries simply because the first are ruled by people who are evil-intentioned and addicted to evil means—notwithstanding the testimony to their good intentions furnished by Mr Lansbury and Lord Halifax; the Soviet Union by good-intentioned men who use evil means (how Stalin must appreciate this!); and the democracies by governments whose intentions and methods are alike good, but not, unfortunately, uniformly or perfectly good.<sup>1</sup> He concludes that "planning undertaken by a national government for the benefit of its people" inevitably makes for international discord; and since, "under the present dispensation", national governments will not adopt the sensible course of getting together to co-ordinate their activities, the drastic alternative of autarchy should be accepted: "the less we have to do with one another, the more likely we are to keep the peace".<sup>2</sup> Lord Beaverbrook has been saying the same thing since long before Mr Huxley saw the light.

The following chapter, on the nature of the State, is notable for three things: the admission that contem-

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, pp. 32 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

porary societies are divided into a ruling and a subject class; the refusal to see that violence and property are in any way relevant to the relation between the rulers and the ruled; and—coming from Mr Huxley—the astonishing contention that even metaphysical and theological systems are fabricated by the rulers and imposed upon the ruled in order to justify their position. Chapters Seven and Eight show us the “political road to a better society”: administrative and industrial decentralisation. Mr Huxley expatiates eloquently on the organisation of the “ideal” factory, and thinks it urgent to determine the exact number of people to be included in a “responsible and self-governing group”—five, ten, twenty or thirty. We may safely pass over these tedious disquisitions; they grossly under-rate the importance of changing the basic institutions of the State, and place an equally one-sided emphasis on militarism as a factor in shaping the tendencies towards economic and political centralisation which have been at work for at least half a century.

The next two chapters carry us into the thick of the argument. Mr Huxley analyses the nature and causes of war, the adequacy or otherwise of the machinery that has been devised to mitigate or avert this evil, and shows what you and I, and all well-intentioned individuals, should do if peace is to be firmly established. These questions will claim our attention in the ensuing pages, and only require to be mentioned at this stage. Mr Huxley then proceeds to discuss “Inequality” and “Education” in two chapters which summarise what may be regarded as a few of the more “advanced” theories in the fields of pedagogics and psychobiology, but it is difficult to see that they have any direct bearing on the issues which demand our decision.

“The last three chapters are the most significant

and, even from the purely practical point of view, the most important in the book.”<sup>1</sup> Entitled respectively “Religious Practices”, “Beliefs” and “Ethics”, they contain a statement of Mr Huxley’s *Weltanschauung*—his conception of the nature of reality, and of the value of meditation, *yoga*, and similar religious and physical exercises. The mystical union with an impersonal God, Mr Huxley suggests, is the end to which we should all aspire. In proportion as we succeed in the effort, by following the methods recommended by Mr Huxley; in proportion as we purify our hearts and become unselfish and disinterested and “non-attached”, the world would be transformed and the perfect society composed of perfect individuals would actualise itself.

## II

### *War—The Psychological Argument*

#### I

Half the controversies about the freedom of the will . . . rest upon the absurd presumption that the proposition, “I can do as I like” is contradictory to the doctrine of necessity. The answer is: Nobody doubts that, at any rate, within certain limits, you can do as you like. But what determines your likings and dislikings?—T. H. HUXLEY.<sup>2</sup>

War exists because people wish it to exist. . . .

If we want to get rid of war we must first of all get rid of its psychological causes.—ALDOUS HUXLEY.

QUESTIONS of war and peace must naturally be in the forefront of our discussion. It is the imminence of another catastrophic clash between the empires that has provoked Mr Huxley to assume the rôle of a social

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Collected Essays*, VI, p. 223.

philosopher, as it is the shadow of that danger, lengthening ominously over the land, that is compelling us all to look for an appropriate line of action. The penalty of indifference will be a nasty and horrible death, or subjection and slavery. If we find that Mr Huxley's views on the subject are sound, we must take his advice and turn our faces to God, believing that our piety will melt the war-clouds and usher in the reign of peace.

Mr Huxley's position can be summed up in a sentence: he holds that the causes of war are ultimately psychological.

We must note that the proposition only acquires significance on the hypothesis, vital in Mr Huxley's system of thought, that our psychological world is a "private universe" in which the forces at work are in part physical and biological, and in part spiritual and supernatural. To accept the proposition is therefore to trust ourselves to what is at best a highly dubious theory in the field of one of the most recent and least mature of the major sciences. Besides, every social occurrence is in a sense psychological, in that it is related, by definition, to the psychological states of human beings; and the assertion that war is a "psychological" phenomenon does not add much to our understanding of its specific nature and causes. It is the intellectual's way of saying something that is hardly worth saying.

We can, however, afford to waive these objections, important as they are, and examine Mr Huxley's case on its merits. He distinguishes, roughly, between two aspects of the psychological causation of war—or, "to be more exact, the psychological background whose existence makes possible the waging of wars".<sup>1</sup> There

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, p. 98.

is, on the one hand, the " tedium of peace "—involving frustration, humiliation and boredom—as contrasted with the tense excitement of war-time life, its licence and its artificial prosperity; and, on the other, the spirit of nationalism, with its attendant hates and enthusiasms.

If we are to treat these factors as causal, as forming the background that " makes wars possible ", we must be able to look upon them as arising and enduring independently of the social and political context; otherwise they would not be the effective and basic evils they are represented to be. A moment's reflection, however, will convince us that we cannot look upon them in that light. On Mr Huxley's own showing, war appeals to people—if it appeals to them at all—because it fills their lives with interest, and offers them sexual freedom, a spurious prosperity and other such attractions; while peace is distasteful because of the petty cares and the dull routine that it imposes on men. Clearly, the psychology that emerges in such circumstances is not an independent cause exercising an independent influence on the course of events. On the contrary, just as the desire for food, which is a psychological fact, depends on and is normally governed by the physiological state of hunger, so this psychological " background " is determined by social conditions which are not psychological in their nature.

Similarly, when we turn to nationalism, the merest acquaintance with history forbids us to regard it as other than a sentiment that flourishes in association with certain distinctive economic and political conditions. Mr Huxley himself recognises that nationalism arose in the nineteenth century; and unless we suppose that the infection was carried by a secret psychological germ, we must connect its subsequent diffusion over the world with the expansion of capital-

ness", but the culmination, or continuation "by other means", of the normal peace-time processes of our civilisation.

We must not only shut our eyes to the truth about the existing international system; we must also, if we wish to cling to the "psychological" theory, falsify our analysis of the internal conditions of a state and their relation to foreign policy. Mr Huxley's discussion of this subject turns on the questions of self-government, centralisation and war. He points out, quite rightly, that authoritarian governments are a greater danger to peace than democracies; and that, conversely, the increasing danger of war calls forth authoritarianism and tends to convert democracies into dictatorships. But there is not a shadow of a hint in his argument that the movement towards centralisation is, even more significantly, determined by social, economic and technological developments which are not in themselves militaristic in character; or that it reflects, primarily, the changing relation between the ruling and subject classes which, on his own admission, form the major divisions in society.<sup>1</sup> He thinks, for instance, that the Sedition Act is simply an answer to the threat of war: it has nothing to do with labour unrest or the rising militancy of the workers; and he appears seriously to believe that, but for the necessities of militarism, an "ideal" scheme of self-government would be put into effect by the dominant oligarchy.<sup>2</sup> These delusions, and distortions of fact, are essential to his case; other-

<sup>1</sup> It is not true, as Mr. Huxley maintains, that the defence of democracy against fascism entails the transformation of democracy into fascism. It is, rather, a foreign policy based on connivance with fascisms abroad which aggravates the tendencies to fascism already present in a country and thus leads to the progressive eclipse of democracy.

<sup>2</sup> *Ends and Means*, pp. 63 ff.

wise, two highly inconvenient conclusions would emerge: first, that violence takes not only the form of war, but of domestic coercion, political and economic; and second, that the constitution of the State, its dictatorial or democratic character, which diminishes or heightens the risk of war, is itself shaped by such extra-psychological forces as economic development and the development of class relations.

## 3

Mr Huxley insists that even the political and economic causes of war are ultimately psychological.<sup>1</sup> They are: they involve the desires and ambitions of actual men and women. Our object, however, is to know why desires and ambitions likely to lead to war are cherished by some people and at certain times, not by others or at other times; why, for instance, contemporary Italy produced a Mussolini, thirsting for glory and empire, and Ethiopia brought forth a Haile Selassie, pinning his faith to peace and collective security. Can the question be met by murmuring "psychology"? "Where production is carried on for profit, it is difficult or impossible," declares Mr Huxley, "to distribute enough purchasing power to enable people to buy the things they themselves have produced," and he adds that such defects "have to be made up by finding foreign markets".<sup>2</sup> But this incapacity, and the corresponding compulsion to reach out—commercially, industrially and financially—for markets, raw materials, etc., cannot be dismissed as "psychological". They are independent of the will or emotions of any single individual—*i.e.*, they are social, being ingrained in the capitalist method of production,

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, pp. 93 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.



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wise, two highly inconvenient conclusions would emerge: first, that violence takes not only the form of war, but of domestic coercion, political and economic; and second, that the constitution of the State, its dictatorial or democratic character, which diminishes or heightens the risk of war, is itself shaped by such extra-psychological forces as economic development and the development of class relations.

## 3

Mr Huxley insists that even the political and economic causes of war are ultimately psychological.<sup>1</sup> They are: they involve the desires and ambitions of actual men and women. Our object, however, is to know why desires and ambitions likely to lead to war are cherished by some people and at certain times, not by others or at other times; why, for instance, contemporary Italy produced a Mussolini, thirsting for glory and empire, and Ethiopia brought forth a Haile Selassie, pinning his faith to peace and collective security. Can the question be met by murmuring "psychology"? "Where production is carried on for profit, it is difficult or impossible," declares Mr Huxley, "to distribute enough purchasing power to enable people to buy the things they themselves have produced," and he adds that such defects "have to be made up by finding foreign markets".<sup>2</sup> But this incapacity, and the corresponding compulsion to reach out—commercially, industrially and financially—for markets, raw materials, etc., cannot be dismissed as "psychological". They are independent of the will or emotions of any single individual—*i.e.*, they are social, being ingrained in the capitalist method of production,

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, pp. 98 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

as intrinsic to it as respiration is to life. Hence the imperialistic expansion to which they drive the capitalist countries is not simply the result of spiritual defects—avarice and hate and anger—cultivated and propagated by our rulers, but the inescapable condition of the existence of the social system which both unites and divides us all.

Our examination of Mr Huxley's argument has thus led us to refer briefly to some of the outstanding features of contemporary society. We see that capitalist states and empires must ("have to") compete with one another and seek to expand, as the price of their survival, and there is no conceivable way in which the unceasing rivalry between them can be "settled" except by armed force. Moreover, the financiers and industrialists and their auxiliaries who compose the ruling class (what other class is interested, in Mr Huxley's words, in preserving "its right to rule and to be rich"?) have, in order to maintain their ascendancy, to resort to violence at home as well as abroad. The degree of coercion they exercise, the measure of democracy they tolerate depends not merely on the proximity of war, but on the condition of the subject class, whether it is passive or rebellious, prosperous or hard pressed. Finally, as Mr Huxley points out,<sup>1</sup> even metaphysical and theological systems are elaborated by the ruling class to strengthen its position; and its all but exclusive control of education and the Press enables it to dominate the minds and emotions, the psychology, of the masses; to keep them "in ignorance and innocence", and to deceive them into imagining that its interests are their interests as well.

These facts are being gradually recognised. Mr Huxley himself acknowledges them, though piecemeal

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, pp. 57-8.

and in different contexts. We have only put them together. To see them as a whole and grasp their interdependence is to acquire a rational understanding of the circumstances in which modern wars arise. It is to know that war is not a phenomenon of a metaphysical or diabolical order, not a mysterious explosion of strange and fearsome lusts bottled up in men, but the entirely explicable result of defects inseparable from the organisation of society to-day and for centuries past. This organisation, the "social machinery", is not—and here we must all agree with Mr Huxley—an autonomous, inhuman force. The men of one generation have built it up, and the men of another can break it down. And it must be broken down, if peace is to be assured; but we can only break it down if we release ourselves from the delusion that it is "natural, necessary and right".

Meanwhile, with these facts to go upon, is there any reason why we should grope blindly in the obscure and uncertain regions of psychology, and evolve a theory of war as an evil to be cured by prayer and fasting and self-flagellation, an evil generated by "an abrupt change in the mode of human consciousness"?

### III

#### *On Ways to Peace*

##### I

MR HUXLEY'S views on how peace may be established have an air of profundity. "If we want to get rid of war," he declares firmly, "we must get rid first of all of its psychological causes. Only when this has been done

will the rulers of the nations even desire to get rid of the economic and political causes.”<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, however, the moment we make an effort to understand this statement, we come up against ambiguities inconsistent with its apparent wisdom. We cannot avoid asking, for instance, in what conceivable way a psychological regeneration achieved by us, within us, within you and me, could have the slightest effect on the “desires of our rulers”, of Mr Chamberlain and Herr Hitler and the Duce. Or is it that Mr Huxley is exhorting *them* to cleanse their hearts of sin?

Moreover, if we are to treat the psychological causes as though they were not derived from any external social circumstances, would not their removal, if successful, automatically eliminate the economic and political causes which, on Mr Huxley’s hypothesis, can exist only so long as they are actuated by the appropriate psychological states? And does this not render meaningless the order of priority that he submits to us? On the other hand, if the psychological causes are not autonomous, there can obviously be no question of removing them first and the others after. The problem would then be one of removing them all together; but since it is impossible to approach the psychological causes directly—since, for example, we cannot abate the fever of nationalism without seizing the machinery of propaganda through which the virus is pumped into us—the attack must in effect be directed against the more accessible, “material” political and economic causes.

## 2

Mr Huxley reaches his all too inconclusive conclusion at the end of an analysis of the existing methods

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, p. 121.

of preserving peace. These methods are mostly embodied in the League of Nations. It is desirable, therefore, that we should be clear as to what the League is and what it is not, in order to be able to appraise the value of Mr Huxley's proposals for its reconstruction and utilisation.

It is important, above all, to remember that the League is not a super-State. It has no executive, judicial or legislative authority of its own. Hence it is inherently incapable of exercising an independent influence on the course of events, whether for war or peace. Even under the happiest conditions, even if every country in the world belonged to it, it would be no more than an œcumenical organisation serving such purposes as the member States found it expedient to regard as common to them all. The League, in short, is an instrument. Whose instrument it is, who its members are, and what purposes it is made to serve depend on political and economic circumstances lying wholly beyond its control.

The history of the League, in itself, suffices to prove that the League must necessarily play a subordinate rôle in world affairs. Founded by the Great Powers who won the last War, it was originally a vehicle of their needs and preoccupations. They turned down the demand for an explicit recognition by the Covenant of the principle of racial and national equality; and they used the League, in its early years, mainly as a weapon with which to "head off" the revolutionary movements of the time and defend the *status quo*—the division of Europe and the world—as established by the Versailles Treaty. The belief that the League could continue in sufficient strength to discharge these tasks was based on the assumption, first, that the League would comprise all the major States; and second, that

the economic and political systems of the world—briefly, capitalism and democracy—would continue to develop without any serious breakdown. The rise of fascism and the Great Depression, however, combined to shatter the assumption. The balance of international power was altered, and the rivalry between the different imperialisms was aggravated. States entered the League or left it, as suited their convenience; while the methods and principles of the League were only employed to the extent that their employment was considered prudent and advantageous by such of the Great Powers as still remained within and dominated it, until at last the august body which was to be the salvation of mankind was reduced to the pitiful state of suspended animation in which it is languishing to-day.

Viewed against this background, Mr Huxley's hope that the risk of war would be appreciably lessened if colonial ownership were internationalised and vested in the League through a modification of the Mandates system, is seen to be the chimera it is.<sup>1</sup> If the League were a government in its own right, equipped with superior force, it could certainly be argued with a semblance of cogency that by assigning to its jurisdiction any particular issue that divides the nations, we should eliminate a potential cause of war. The League, however, is not a government: it is an instrument of governments; and it has no peculiar virtue by means of which it can exorcise the evils that haunt the world. At best, it can provide the theatre in which international antagonisms are revealed as a prelude, or an accompaniment, to armed struggle. The sorry record of the Non-Intervention Committee in relation to the war in Spain should leave us under no illusions on this score.

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, p. 120.

Besides, capitalist States and empires seek colonies not so much to indulge a zeal to share the burden of governing natives justly and in accordance with the best anthropological advice, but in order to acquire additional areas of exploitation. A colony is valuable to them in proportion as their control over it is absolute. Exclusive ownership alone, expressed in and dependent on sovereignty, can enable them to develop and exploit the colony on their own terms—*i.e.*, on unequal terms, dictated not by any economic law, but by force—and thus reap the profits wherewith to strengthen their position as against rival imperialisms. To suggest that they should “pool their resources” and put the Mandates Commission in charge is to suggest that they should cut their own throats.

Proposals of this kind are grounded in the baseless belief that a lasting and equitable settlement, *i.e.*, a final division of the world, can be brought about by a group of imperialist powers negotiating round a conference table. How simple our problems would be if this were possible! But it is not. We have to face the fact that the economic system in the different capitalist countries develops at different rates, and thus periodically drives a State to the point where it is compelled to demand a revision of the existing arrangements. A revision in its favour cannot but be a revision prejudicial to the States in possession. Even among these latter, anything like a permanent accord is ruled out by the inherent incompatibility of their respective claims and interests. (We need only refer to the fact that the highly co-ordinated and centralised international economic organisation built up by the Allied Governments during the War years quickly fell to pieces, and was succeeded by an intensification of their inter-imperialist rivalries as soon as the immediate

aim of crushing the rise of Germany was achieved.) Nor, clearly, is any question of equity involved in these conflicts. Whether, for example, East Africa should be a part of the British Empire or the German, whether Shanghai should be under Japanese or Anglo-American control are issues for which there is no relevant moral or ethical formula. They belong to the sphere of power politics; and in that sphere, as Lord Halifax declared not long ago, "force and force alone decides".

Mr Huxley, we must add, is not unaware of these difficulties. He refers to them in demolishing the argument that peace could be ensured by the creation of an International Police Force. Indeed, so long as the world is split up into a number of sovereign States, each serving the interests of a privileged class, and the dominant system of production stimulates in our rulers urgent economic appetites whose denial means death (to them) and whose satisfaction means war, there can be no stable and unified world-organisation, and hence also no prospect of peace. But if the International Police Force is, as Mr Huxley says, an impracticable and immoral dream,<sup>1</sup> what are we to think of his own project for an international Empire? Is it not equally immoral and impracticable? And if the former is to be described "as by Machiavelli out of News from Nowhere", may we not describe Mr Huxley's own proposal as by *The Cloud of Unknowing* out of Brave New World?

It is quite conceivable that the States which conspired to deprive Germany, by force, of the colonies she formerly possessed would consent now to restore them to her, under threat of force. But let us not delude ourselves that this partial surrender of imperialist loot to a "virile nation", as pacifists regard Germany,

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, p. 114.



that is, an imperialist power armed to the teeth, is either justice or a step towards perpetual peace. It is merely the tribute paid by pacifist virtue to fascist vice. It is the pacifists' manner of echoing Mussolini's words, spoken after the Nazi annexation of Austria: "When an event is destined by Fate, it is better that we should be with it than against it."

## 3

While Mr Huxley believes that it is desirable to convert the League into the organ of an international Empire, he is convinced that the central principle of the League as it stands to-day, the principle of mutual assistance in the event of a member State being subjected to attack, is intrinsically wrong. "Morality and common sense are at one in demanding . . . that Article XVI should be removed from the Covenant." And in support of this view, Mr Huxley cites the arguments of certain Catholic theologians to the effect that, in the circumstances of the present time, "the vital interests of the community . . . must inevitably suffer more from the waging of war than they would suffer by non-resistance to violence".<sup>1</sup>

The proposition is integral to Mr Huxley's pacifism. But if we are to subscribe to it, we must know what "vital interests" mean. (Mr Huxley himself makes no attempt to define them for us.) We can think of these interests as being either spiritual or material in character. If they are conceived of as spiritual, moral, ideal values, existing apart from human action, they cannot be subverted by violence, nor can resistance uphold or corrupt them. If, on the contrary, they are material, physical and biological, violence can

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, pp. 110-111.

destroy them and, equally, what violence can destroy, violence can safeguard. In neither of these cases, therefore, is there any incompatibility between vital interests and the violence used to attack or defend them. But these are hypothetical cases. In actual life, the interests concerned are both material and moral, simultaneously and indissolubly. They are, as we may say, "institutional": Democracy, for example, trade unionism, working-class rights in general, a given economic and political order, etc.

Mr Huxley's contention may now be restated as follows: There are no vital social interests, no systems of culture or industrial and political organisation which would not suffer more by resistance than by non-resistance to the violence levelled at them. Stated in these terms, the assertion has clearly none of the plausibility that it seems to have if we go by Mr Huxley's somewhat crude and ambiguous phrasing. It is of course open to us to maintain, as the fascists do, that working-class rights, or democracy, for instance—they are of crucial significance in this context—are not vital interests; but if we concede that they are, can we honestly hold that they would suffer more by resistance to violence directed against them than by non-resistance? Reason, no less than the contemporary history of the working class, cries out against the absurdity of the conclusion. It can only be justified on the assumption that no social order could possibly be worse than that which obtains to-day. While the assumption may be cherished, at any rate in theory, by the privileged ones amongst us, it can hardly be expected to command the support of the millions who cling precariously to their meagre liberties and know full well what their loss would mean.

## 4

Continuing his argument, Mr Huxley suggests in the chapter on "Individual Work for Reform" that, although the use of violence to defend vital interests is both wrong and futile, it is legitimate to combat evil by methods that do not involve violence.<sup>1</sup> War, the supreme evil, can also be fought by these means.

We may admit at once that non-violent resistance, or pacifism, has had a measure of success in the limited number of cases that Mr Huxley adduces in proof. The Hungarian Deák, and Gandhi in our time, organised movements of "passive resisters", and were thereby able to exact from their respective governments the concessions they demanded. But we must not exaggerate the significance of these episodes. Gandhi's South African campaign of civil disobedience resulted in a settlement of sorts, but every Indian knows that his fellow-countrymen in the Dominion continue to this day to suffer under various measures of racial discrimination, while it was not until the end of the Great War that Hungary regained her freedom. As for India, it is undeniable that the protracted, heroic and patient practice of non-violence by the nationalists has led to far-reaching changes in the country: it has, above all, kindled a revolutionary spirit; but to contend, as Mr Huxley does,<sup>2</sup> that something approaching a "revolution" has been effected is either to misuse language or betray a gross ignorance of the facts. The latest Constitution conferred upon India by Parliament has been condemned even by Indian right-wing leaders as reactionary in comparison to the one which preceded it. Only imperialists like Mr Churchill and Lord Rothermere profess to see in it a revolutionary

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, pp. 140 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

departure. These examples show of course that non-violence has been tried: but they contain no evidence that non-violence is adequate for every purpose—for the purpose, in particular, of compelling a ruling class which, on Mr Huxley's admission, controls the State machine, to yield its power to others.

There is, then, no reason to hold that non-violence can effect a revolution in the strict sense of the word—a transfer of political power from one class to another. The belief that non-violence can avert war or bring it to a speedy end once it has broken out is, as we shall see, equally unfounded. No one, of course, can dispute the statement that if everybody agreed to renounce violence, take the peace pledge and adhere loyally to it, there would be no more war. "Everybody", on this hypothesis, would include the war-makers, the governing classes who, according to Mr Huxley, are incurably militaristic in outlook. Even if we confine our attention to the vast majority of ordinary men and women who by resolute pacifism are to coerce their rulers into the paths of peace, it is obvious that their conversion to the principle of non-violence cannot be achieved overnight. Notwithstanding the unique force of his personality and the exceptionally favourable conditions under which he may be said to have worked, it has taken Gandhi nearly twenty years to build up a nucleus of devoted passive resisters—and yet they represent, on a liberal estimate, not more than a fraction of one per cent. of the Indian population. We can each make our own guess as to the length of time that would be required to obtain a similar result in Western Europe. And we must couple our conjectures with the assumption that during all that period the State would continue to allow pacifist propaganda to be carried on. What is more, if the process is not to be indefinitely

prolonged, we must find some method of ensuring that pacifist convictions are transmitted by heredity: that the children and the grandchildren of the converts that we make are naturally and innately wedded to non-violence. Otherwise, our task would never be finished. In other words, a miracle is necessary if pacifism is to be crowned with success. Meanwhile, the iron ring of war is closing in ever more tightly and sharply around us.

But the question is so important that we must not leave it at this. Let us assume that a considerable number of determined pacifists are already in existence; and that they belong not to the professional classes or the intelligentsia whose services the Government may perhaps be able at a pinch to dispense with, but to the working class without which it can neither make munitions nor wage war. In the event of an emergency, our hypothetical pacifist workers are bound to be called up for "national service". Doubtless, their places in the factory would be taken by women. The work that they themselves would be required to do would also be directly or indirectly military in character: either actual killing or helping others to kill. As pacifists, they must refuse to engage in such activities. What then? While the Government may be content to send a handful of middle-class conscientious objectors and pacifists to gaols and concentration camps, and thus get them out of the way, would they not deal with mass, *i.e.*, working-class, resistance by other methods? Would they not seek to exact obedience by force? That they would, is not only probable, but certain. How much force is used and what the consequences are would depend entirely on the extent of the opposition. A few small detachments of well-drilled pacifists would present no serious problem to the Government;

on the other hand, such hand-picked heroes may be expected to endure the most rigorous ordeals and make the ultimate sacrifice of their lives without the least deviation from the principle of non-violence. But as the will to resistance spreads among our imaginary pacifist masses, the Government would undoubtedly feel itself obliged to bring into operation the powerful apparatus of coercion that it wields, including bombing-planes and machine-guns; while on the side of its opponents, defections from the straight line of absolute pacifism would multiply, and increasing numbers would try to defend themselves by every means available to them. If the trade unions and the Labour movement were to become predominantly pacifist the result would be not, as Mr Huxley suggests, a peaceful transformation of the world situation, but the immediate precipitation of a civil war.

The argument that widespread and organised mass resistance to any major item of governmental policy must lead to civil conflict can hardly be refuted by pointing to the success of the Councils of Action in stopping the Lloyd George Government from waging war on Russia in 1920. Mr Huxley presents this incident to us as an example of what can be achieved by "groups of war-resisters, if they are sufficiently large . . . and sufficiently unanimous".<sup>1</sup> The Labour Party and the Trade Unions which took the leading part in organising the Councils of Action were not, however, permeated by pacifist ideology. They opposed the war not because it was "war", but war of a particular kind; because they realised that it was a war against socialism, against the working class, against themselves. They were, consequently, prepared to back up their opposition with every ounce of industrial and political

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, p. 152.

strength they possessed. The prevailing temper of these Councils of Action which Lenin described as "in actual fact Soviets" may be gathered, for instance, from Mr J. H. Thomas's words to the National Conference held in London. "When you vote for this resolution [pledging resistance to any form of intervention against Russia], do not do so," he said, "on the assumption that you are merely voting for a simple down-tools policy. It is nothing of the kind. If this resolution is to be given effect to, it means a challenge to the whole Constitution of the country." Nor can we ignore in this connection the general background of the whole period. "The revolutionary outburst that was threatening in 1914 now seemed likely to materialise in a far more acute form and in circumstances vastly more menacing to the existing social order. Not only was the mass of the working class in a state of ferment; for the first time, millions of working men had been trained to the use of arms, great numbers were still under arms."<sup>1</sup> The Government gave in: the war against Russia was called off. But to suggest that its surrender was a triumph for the pacifist cause is surely a travesty of the facts. In the context of the political and economic situation of the time, it appears rather as a prudent reluctance to persist in a policy that threatened to provoke grave domestic strife.

## 5

Before leaving the subject of the efficacy of non-violence, we must pause briefly to examine another of Mr Huxley's proposals. "Associations of devoted individuals," he suggests, should be formed in order "to act upon the ideas of the solitary writer or speaker,

<sup>1</sup> Allen Hutt, *The Post-War History of the British Working-Class*, p. 15.



to make practical applications of what were merely theories, to construct here and now small working-models of the better society. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

What is the precise significance of the idea of a “working-model of a better society”? In real society, it is agreed, the chief obstacles to betterment are war and militarism. War and militarism are the result of complex intertwined forces. Real society would be a better society in so far as these forces are overcome. It is by the process of overcoming them that we shall bring about the transformation we desire. Hence it is this process which is of vital concern to us. A “working-model of a better society”, if it is to have any value, must accordingly be a model of this process.

Mr Huxley holds that the “working-model” would be a “demonstration that the new theories may be made to produce desirable results in practice”.<sup>2</sup> The new theories are theories of means, of the process of achieving our end, the “better society”. To be specific, the “new theory” holds that non-violence is the right method by which war and oppression can be eliminated. The “working-model”, however, does not show us this method in operation: it only shows us the result, the state of affairs that would obtain *after* this method has been applied and applied successfully. We want to know if non-violence can help us to overthrow the forces of militarism. Mr Huxley says: I offer you a “working-model” where no forces of war and oppression exist, or require to be overthrown.

If our central problem is one of method, the only “model” that could be of the least use to us is one in which a proposed method is shown at work; in which it is shown as dealing with the material and encountering the resistances—such method and such resistances

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, p. 128.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.



as any method will have to face—and overcoming them. If Mr Huxley would build a “working-model” in which the method of non-violence is practised as an object-lesson to the rest of us, he must make room in his “working-model” for militarism, capitalism and the State, which are the resistances with which non-violence has to deal in actual life, and show us, moreover, that in this “working-model” non-violence does prevail over such resistances. That alone would constitute a “demonstration”. And as the “working-model” is itself a part of the new theories, a “working-model” that is actually set up by Mr Huxley’s followers must contain, if it is to work, another “working-model” within it, and so on, *ad infinitum*.

To suggest that such a demonstration is possible, or that such model colonies—“duo-decimo editions of the New Jerusalem”—can help to solve our problems is, manifestly, nonsense.

## 6

It cannot be validly maintained, therefore, even in theory, that the exercise of non-violence by pacifist groups and the organisation of pacifist colonies can avail to ensure peace, or that there are no “vital interests” liable to destruction through violence and capable of being defended by the same means. Only sheer blindness or perversity can lead us to deny that everywhere in the world institutions that we may legitimately regard as “vital interests” are being violently attacked; or to insinuate, as is the way of many pacifists, that the concepts of aggression and aggressor are empty of precise significance and need to be used always within inverted commas. The peoples of China and Spain, and even France and Czechoslovakia, who bear on their bodies—or have good

reason to fear that they may soon have to bear—the harsh impact of military attack cannot afford to indulge in such sophistries.

We can now see why collective security, against which Mr Huxley fulminates in his most righteous tones, is the common-sense method of preventing war to-day. If we agree that armed defence against aggression is desirable, whether we decide to conduct that defence in isolation from or in alliance with others who stand in similar danger is mainly a matter of expediency. And in the circumstances of the present time, when three powerful states, Germany, Japan and Italy, are openly working to a nicely calculated plan for the military domination of the world, is it not right, reasonable, natural that all the rest should combine for their common safety and form a “peace bloc”, determined with their collective strength to resist attack directed against any one of them? The fact that an effort along these lines—to assist Abyssinia or the Spanish Government, or to guarantee the independence of Czechoslovakia—is bound to be regarded by the fascist Powers as a hostile manœuvre is in itself a plain indication of the importance they attach to being able to fall upon their victims one by one. By abstaining from this policy, we shall neither appease the aggressor nor save our skins; we should only be the less able, when our time comes, to offer any resistance. For the alternative to collective security is not peace. The alternative is a series of civil and international wars by means of which the peoples of the world, of Europe, Asia and Africa at any rate, would be separately vanquished and subjected to a cruel tyranny.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Considerations of space compel us to limit ourselves to a bare indication of the negative case for collective security. Positively, the effort to achieve collective security entails the

## IV

*On Violence and Charity*

## I

TURNING to the more general conceptions which run through Mr Huxley's book, it would be best to begin by examining his views on the question of force and violence in human affairs. Violence, Mr Huxley contends, is not merely inefficient; it is an unqualified evil.<sup>1</sup> At all times and in all circumstances, and in whatever form it has been used, violence has had nothing but "undesirable" results. And by systematically ignoring the fact that violence to body as well as to mind is ingrained in the texture of our society: that the State, the relations between the rulers and the ruled, are based ultimately not on ethics but on force, Mr Huxley is able to throw the whole weight of his argument on the iniquity of violence as an instrument of change. No well-intentioned person, he declares, can have anything to do with war or revolution. The way to meet these is partly through the development of moral power within oneself, and partly by the building up of ideal communities which would painlessly transform the existing institutions of society.

It is, clearly, impossible to say whether violence, considered in the abstract, is good or evil, for none of

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mobilisation and strengthening of all democratic and peace forces in the world; while the check thereby imposed on fascist expansion is bound to accelerate the collapse of the rotten internal economy of the fascist States and thus hasten the transition to a political and economic system which would not periodically require for its existence the slaughter of millions of human beings.

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, pp. 25 ff.

us can tell what "violence in the abstract" means. We can only judge by the form that violence takes and the consequences to which it leads. If we grant this, we see at once why the assertion that violence always produces violence and nothing but violence is simply not true. A blow aimed at a man's head may knock him down—but it may lead, obviously, to a great many other consequences. Must we suppose that the money stolen from him is necessarily spent to promote further violent designs? Mr Huxley says that "considerable quantities of capital" would be required to set his "ideal communities" going.<sup>1</sup> Such large sums cannot, of course, be derived from any other source than banks and similar financial institutions which have grown fat on the plunder of innumerable wars and the daily oppression of the workers. Can a community which rests on foundations thus tainted with violence be described as either "good" or "ideal"?

These considerations are only confirmed when we apply them to historical fact. "A revolution," according to Mr Huxley, "can do nothing but breed more violence, resentment, hate . . ." and he attempts to support the generalisation with the argument that conscription, militarism, nationalist idolatries and the horrors of imperialism are due to the violence employed by the Jacobin dictatorship. It cannot be disputed that, in a sense, the French Revolution did lead to all these consequences, but, equally, we cannot discuss or evaluate them except in the context of scientific and technological developments which took place at the same time. Science and technology produced not only the murderous weapons used at Amritsar and Denshawai, at Badajoz and Guernica, but also Pasteur and Ross and Wassermann and a great many others

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, p. 159.

like them and a great deal of work like theirs. So we must say the Jacobin dictatorship led to these things as well. To pick out any of these multifarious and interdependent consequences and relate them to the use of violence by the Jacobins is a singularly unphilosophical and arbitrary procedure. The plain lesson of history is that the violence bred by wars and revolutions is but the smallest part of their consequences. Their total and relatively permanent effect is, on the other hand, to transform the character of human institutions, to alter the quality of men's lives, to provide them with different ideals and values, to raise or depress their material standard of well-being. The French Revolution, the British conquest of India, the Russian Revolution—these were not outbursts of abstract violence engendering more abstract violence; they were events which substituted one social structure for another and re-shaped the very pattern of existence for millions of individuals.

Mr Huxley's over-simplification, indeed, involves us in yet greater difficulties. He regards the violence of the Great War as a result of the French Revolution and the violence of fascism as the reaction to revolutionary violence released by the Great War. But why should we confine our attention to the present and the recent past? If the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is to be explained by reference to the Jacobin dictatorship, is there any reason why we should not account for the latter by saying that it "resulted" from the Roy Soleil's militarism, from the unification of France under Richelieu (which was by no means achieved by pacifist methods), and go back still farther to the Italian wars, and so on and on until we come ultimately to the first cave-man who beat his wife, and Cain who killed Abel? This is a theory

of violence which evidently requires us to believe that the whole trouble started in the Garden of Eden.<sup>1</sup>

## 2

Mr Huxley does not face these difficulties at all, but he tries to bring his theory more in harmony with the facts by admitting, in the first place, that it is permissible to use a small dose of violence ("very little violence") in enforcing reforms.<sup>2</sup> This admission clearly cuts at the root of the whole argument, and there is no need to dwell on it. Hitler and Mussolini, themselves, do not desire to use more than "very little violence" in the attainment of their objects. Secondly, Mr Huxley suggests that the effects of violence can be neutralised; that is, violence can lead to real progress, if "by way of compensation and reparation, it is followed by non-violence, by acts of justice and goodwill".<sup>3</sup> That "charity" can be promoted by the offer of compensation after violence has been exercised is an idea surprisingly Machiavellian in a writer who is so consciously striving after righteousness, but it is essential to his scheme of thought. Otherwise, the history of mankind would seem an unrelieved chronicle of evil, and the conception of progress, of human effort to "improve" society, would be rendered meaningless.

Unfortunately, Mr Huxley does not think it worth while to tell us anything precise about the nature of the conciliatory act by which violence is counteracted. It must evidently mean more than a conciliatory "spirit", a disposition of goodwill on the

<sup>1</sup> This view is strongly reminiscent of the Nazi dogma that "the Jews" are the source of all evil, and the opinion of some Catholic historians that the decline of modern civilisation is the result of Martin Luther's sins.

<sup>2</sup> *Ends and Means*, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

part of those who have used violence towards those upon whom they have used it, for in many cases where the use of violence is censured by Mr Huxley, such a disposition exists or will be claimed. It is difficult to believe that Mussolini has anything but goodwill for the people of Abyssinia and Spain. And we all know how respectful the Japanese are towards the "real culture of China". Does not the leader of the Japanese forces in China compose verses in classical Chinese? Compensation or conciliation, therefore, must represent some form of action, but how can any such action be "just" or "moral", as Mr Huxley says it has been and could be, seeing that the power of one party to act upon another in this way has itself been acquired through immorality and violence? Is it not clear that no "compensatory" act can be held to be truly compensatory so long as the position established by violence, which is the basis of that act, remains unchanged? If I seize your land by violence, and pay you daily wages for working on it, say to build a railway (otherwise you will starve), is my action to be regarded as compensatory and just? If the Japanese conquer China and tax the Chinese people, and establish law-courts in which to charge and sentence the Chinese who refuse to pay up, are they to be considered to have undone the effects of their violence?

These instances are typical of the history of the last few centuries, of the wars and revolutions of modern times, and it is impossible to make sense of them on Mr Huxley's theory of abstract violence being neutralised by acts of abstract justice. The opposition to British rule in India has been provoked not so much by the memory of the violent deeds committed by Clive and Warren Hastings as by a realisation of the nature of the "compensatory" behaviour of British

administrators after the violence was over".<sup>1</sup> Mr Huxley leaves us to presume that he is referring in this passage to what less sophisticated writers describe as the benefits of British rule—railways, law courts, etc. It is, however, precisely against these—or rather, the situation created by these "compensatory acts", among which we must include such far-reaching measures as land revenue settlement—that the present agitation is directed. Not violence, but what Mr Huxley regards as "justice" is the parent of the revolutionary movement in India. Similarly, if the democracies and, in particular, the working classes are anxious to check fascism, the anxiety must be ascribed not to their detestation of fascist violence, abominable as it is; nor even to an inherent taste for murder that Mr Huxley imputes to them; but to their entirely laudable detestation of fascist "justice" and "morality", of the "compensatory behaviour of the fascist administrators after the violence is over".

## V

### *On "Ends" and "Means"*

#### I

THIS incapacity to deal coherently with the facts of history, the insistence that violence must always lead to violence, that "compensatory" acts of charity must lead to an increase in charity, is rooted in the central fallacy of Mr Huxley's philosophy—that good ends cannot be attained by evil means.<sup>2</sup>

An end is something we want to attain. What we

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25 and *passim*.



have now is something different from the end—its antithesis, shall we say? The means represent the way in which we may pass from the state of not having attained our end to the state of having attained it. But "way" is the wrong metaphor. Means are dynamic. Their function is to remove, eliminate or overcome the obstacles that divide us from the end. If, for example, salvaging a house on fire is the end, a good end, the means must be capable of coping with the obstacle that lies between us and the salvaged house, *i.e.*, the fire, which in this context is evil. The condition of attaining an end, the good, is accordingly the employment of means capable of coping with that which is not good. The formula that good means alone can lead to good ends ignores the obvious truth that, in the very nature of the case, means must deal with or relate to that which is external to the end and hence not good.

This necessarily intermediate and contradictory character of means can only be denied if we believe, as Mr Huxley does, in a timeless and ideal Good as the end, for we shall then judge the means not in their relation to any immediate end, but in relation to and in the light of the ultimate Good. In this case, however, as we shall see presently, the distinction between ends and means becomes meaningless. Our end, Mr Huxley says, is the Just Society. Soon we discover that this is not the end at all: the end is a mystical union with the Absolute. The Just Society is a means to this end. What are the means by which the Just Society can be established? Decentralisation and self-government; co-operative production; the abolition of war; reduction of inequality; education. But these means do not exist, they have to be achieved. So they are themselves ends. If decentralisation is

an end, it is also a means—not only to the Just Society, but to all the other ends at its level. Each of these other ends is similarly a means not only to the Just Society but to all the other ends.

We have thus reached one of the “vicious circles” of which Mr Huxley frequently complains. Decentralisation, etc., are ends as well as means. The vicious circle can be broken through and these ends achieved, Mr Huxley goes on to suggest; by the “private individual”. But not by every “private individual”, only by such of them as are “well-intentioned and devoted”. Who are these “well-intentioned and devoted” individuals? The ideally well-intentioned and devoted individual must, on this theory, be one who has attained the “ideal good”—union with God. “Only non-attached men and women can organise the free and just society.”<sup>1</sup>

This, then, is the proposition we reach: Individuals who have attained union with God are the means by which the end of decentralisation is attained—which is the means to the Just Society, which, in turn, is nothing but a collective noun for a number of individuals who have attained union with God. In short, the end is union with God; the means, too, are union with God. Where ends and means are reduced to identity in this manner, the very conception of “ideals and the nature of the methods employed to realise them”<sup>2</sup> is reduced to nonsense. Whether we call violence and charity and non-attachment, decentralisation, the “model community” and the Just Society—whether we call any of these an end or a means is of

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> “An Enquiry into the Nature of Ideals and into the Methods Employed for their Realisation” is the sub-title of *Ends and Means*.

no consequence whatever. It is merely a matter of dogmatic classification.

## 2

Since means and ends are thus mechanically united and separated in Mr Huxley's philosophy, there is a denial in it as well of what we have described as the essentially contradictory and intermediate character of the means; of the obvious fact that the need for means is a need for effective agencies wherewith to overcome the gulf between a certain starting-point and a certain end. To say that violence can only produce violence, goodness goodness, and so on is of course to say that the means must be identical in quality with the end. It is to say that there is no real transition involved, no process of change at all, only a sequence of repeated discontinuities.

If we believe in this doctrine of means: that they are inert and do not act upon that which prevents us from attaining our end; that, as the result of some miraculous power, they are reincarnated as their own ends, it is quite natural that we should hold with Mr Huxley that the means to goodness consist in goodness; the way to be a good man is to *be* a good man—not to *become* one, for the idea of becoming suggests an admixture of evil; the way to a Just Society (which is only another name for a society of good men) is not to attack existing injustice, but to form a community of good men. If these good men stand on their heads in yogic fervour and meditate on their glands and cultivate non-attachment—and let us remember that good men are men who do these things—cows will yield more milk, the wicked ruling caste will sink into oblivion, the Walls of Jericho will fall and the Just Society will come into being.

The wicked ruling caste and the Walls of Jericho which stand between us and our end are evil. To attack them is necessarily to soil our hands. Our end, however, is goodness—hands clean of blood and filth. And since we must not adopt any means which are inconsistent with our end, we must not attack our rulers or the Walls of Jericho. The sight of our immaculate hands will somehow, by some miracle in which Mr Huxley seems firmly to believe, dazzle them into non-existence. The establishment of a “working-model” of the “ideal society” would transform—how? that is the question to which Mr Huxley gives us no answer—the tigers in the jungle of capitalism and the tyrants in a world of slaves into white lambs of innocence.

For, we must note, expressions such as “breeds”, “produces”, “makes for” and “leads to” are devoid of meaning in Mr Huxley’s philosophy, as they must be in any philosophy based on the maxim that good means alone are consistent with good ends. They are merely verbal bridges over an abyss of nothingness. When we say that violence “breeds” violence, that goodness “makes for” goodness, that the “working-model” leads to the ideal community, all that we are saying is that violence, goodness, the ideal community, repeat themselves. Bad “means” must produce bad “ends”; violence, more violence; anger, more anger; patience, more patience; and love, more love. In Mr Huxley’s *Brave New World* there are no jilted lovers.

## 3

Where the concept of means is thus obliterated, and the function of means is assigned to a miracle; where the transition between means and ends is regarded not

as a process but as a discontinuity; where one term of the equation is considered to be identical in nature with the other, is it not obvious that anything that is represented as "means" must of necessity be a "starting-point" as well? And indeed all Mr Huxley's "means" *are* starting-points. Violence is one, goodness another; and the others: meditation, physiological exercises, or yoga, the practice of virtue, the non-attached man, the working-model, the Just Society.

Physiological exercises, etc., are intended to produce the good man—and let us emphasise it once more: the significance of this production, its process are veiled in obscurity, and the process of production is the means. The good man is to combine with other good men to set up the "working-model", and the "working-model" is to produce the Just Society. Out of physiological exercises as the starting-point, we get the good man as the result; out of the good man, the "working-model", and out of the "working-model", the Just Society. But observe that *by definition* the good man is one who indulges in physiological exercises and practises virtue; the "working-model" is a collection of good men, and the "ideal community", the Just Society, is but the "working-model" writ large. Yet the good man, the "working-model" and the Just Society are our ends or goals. So in Mr Huxley's philosophy the goal is the starting-point and the starting-point is the goal. The starting-point is only another name for the "real", and the goal for the "ideal". The real, therefore, is the ideal—in a sense that would make Hegel turn in his grave.

## VI

*The Philosophical Basis of Pacifism*

## I

THE tautology is intrinsic in Mr Huxley's world view. There is, he says, a World, a Whole, an integrating principle which is spiritual.<sup>1</sup> It "underlies" all our separate individual consciousnesses. On the other hand, there are these separate individual consciousnesses. They are fragments of the Greater Whole. The true, real, ultimate end of the individual *is*—because Mr Huxley and others think and have thought it *ought* to be—to overcome his individuality and merge it with the great Spiritual Whole.

For the sake of convenience let us use the terms God and man. God and man are one. And yet they are not one. Man suffers from the illusion of separateness. There are two interdependent ways in which he can overcome this illusion: (1) Meditation, or "the supra-rational concentration of the will"; (2) the practice of goodness.

Meditation (and other methods of self-training) extend the limits of one's awareness of unity, until in the end the awareness is absolute and unlimited. The practice of goodness means behaviour which embodies the awareness of unity; and hence means the practice of virtues such as love and compassion and understanding, which express the unity of all being.

The supreme reality, the universal consciousness, God is impersonal, hence non-ethical. Man, the apparent reality, the fragmentary consciousness, is

<sup>1</sup> The following discussion is based on Mr Huxley's concluding chapters.

personal. The re-establishment of unity between the fragment and the Whole, the expansion of the fragmentary consciousness until it is co-extensive with the Whole, constitutes its end. Since man is personal and his end is the transcendence of personality, he is ethical. He can *choose* to attain this end. He *does* attain this end to the extent he chooses it: *i.e.*, his will perceives it; and to the extent his behaviour is ethical, *i.e.*; to the extent that it expresses unity through the virtues of love, compassion and understanding. On this argument, whether we call the end ethical or not is immaterial. The quality or nature of that end is unity. Goodness, by definition, is that which makes for unity. Hence perfect unity, which is our end, is perfect goodness.

What are our means for achieving this perfect goodness?

We can achieve this perfect goodness, which is perfect unity, through systematic self-training and the practice of virtue. Self-training and the practice of virtue are only differentiated for convenience. They involve each other; and they denote, respectively, the knowledge of goodness and unity, and the practice of goodness and unity. So the means to achieve perfect goodness and unity are the knowledge of perfect goodness and unity, on the one hand, and the practice of them, on the other.

What, then, is the difference between our end and our means? It is obviously a difference of degree. By being and knowing and practising goodness and unity, we achieve more goodness and unity. Goodness breeds more goodness. X breeds more X. As Mr Huxley says: "Goodness, meditation, the mystical experience and the ultimate impersonal reality discovered in mystical experience are organically related."

But what are we who employ these means? We are fragments of the totality of goodness and unity, and have a nostalgic longing—"our minds are so constituted"—to reintegrate our fragment with the totality.

So, if the means and the end are of like nature, the starting-point is of like nature with the means and the end. What differentiates them one from the other is the extent to which they approximate to or recede from absolute perfection, universality or totality; the extent to which the illusion of separateness is transcended. I am good: my end is utmost goodness: my means are more and more goodness.

## 2

In terms of goodness and unity, this formula reproduces the conclusion to which we were led in our analysis of the concept of ends and means as used by Mr Huxley: that to him ends, means and starting-points are all the same—only more so.

Mr Huxley is able to acquiesce in this conclusion and persuade his followers that it is reasonable and convincing, only by a sedulous practice of a vice that he is loudest in decrying, the vice of "inattention". Systematically, he refuses to face the questions which arise on the basis of his argument, and either declares that an answer is impossible or unnecessary; or gives such contradictory answers that the inference is irresistible that his "passions" and his "self-interest" have driven him to take up a position which he is prepared to defend, however great a sacrifice it may entail of the ordinary canons of coherence and integrity.

To begin with, he points out that, parallel to the "spiritual unity" or Whole which his mystic "investigators" have discovered, there is an "under-



lying physical unity" discovered by natural science. Clearly, however, this parallelism is false. For the physical principle—if we may call it that—exists in time and space, whereas the "spiritual principle", by definition, is immutable and eternal. Besides, the physical principle is not something that exists apart from its particular manifestations. When we say that the ultimate physical constituents of a table and a book are the same, we do not mean that there is a mysterious physical something which underlies—simultaneously—the table and the book as separate existents. All that we mean is that each of them can be reduced to the properties of the other.

Mr Huxley's "spiritual unity" is, however, of a totally different kind. It is a "perfect and universal consciousness", timeless, and yet existing separately from it are the fragmentary consciousnesses. Man grows: his consciousness is heightened and expanded to the dimensions of a pre-existing universal. He is not, on this theory, disintegrated to provide the elements which would go to the making of another particular existent.

But not only does Mr Huxley hide the fact that there is no analogy between the physical principle and the so-called spiritual principle, but their juxtaposition provokes a question which he dismisses in the most casual manner. "Concerning the relation between the two," he says, "it is hard to express an opinion. Nor is it necessary, in the present context, that we should express one." But for Mr Huxley's philosophy, this is a fundamental question. Good is by definition unity and evil separateness. How did this primordial evil come into being? This original detachment of matter from spirit?

Not only does Mr Huxley present us with a spiritual

unity and a physical unity, but discussing mind, he reaches the conclusion that there is an autonomous "mental world", which is beyond time. So we have three ultimates: spirit, mind and matter. How they are related to each other, whether they have been in existence, simultaneously and independently, from before the beginning of time, are questions which Mr Huxley thinks it "unnecessary" to answer—notwithstanding that an answer is essential if we are to make any sense of his philosophy.

Having arbitrarily postulated three different "worlds"—one of spirit, another of mind and another of matter—Mr Huxley suddenly produces out of his hat a "mental-material conglomerate". When and in what circumstances two of these three different worlds became fused, became a "conglomerate", and whether the mental world nevertheless continues to subsist apart from the physical, are presumably among the questions on which it is "not necessary to express an opinion". This confusion, however, becomes worse confounded when Mr Huxley goes on to suggest that the (unexplained) appearance of this "mental-material conglomerate" marks also the appearance of "life and consciousness". Consciousness, at any rate, Mr Huxley had earlier given us to understand, belonged to a special spiritual universe, of which it was only a detached fragment.

But worse is to come. We proceed, with Mr Huxley, to consider the "history of this mental-material conglomerate", and at the end of two or three paragraphs we are informed that "evolution has resulted in the world as it is to-day". Since this mental-material conglomerate includes a fragment of spirit or consciousness, it is legitimate to infer that it, too, evolves, changes, has a history; but the inference is irrecon-

cilable with our postulate that spirit is beyond time and perfect.

And once more we are confronted with the question Mr Huxley continually shirks: why did this perfect and timeless spirit extrude fragments of itself into the mental and material worlds? What was the power or principle greater than spirit that constrained it to submit to scission? What, in short, is evil? Why did man become divorced from God?

Stated in the language of Christian theology, if God is good and perfect, why is man wicked and imperfect? Mr Huxley obscurely recognises the trend of his speculations, but he dare not pose the question in these terms—for in these terms it has been answered, in so far as it admits of answer, variously by various theologians; and he would be obliged to accept one or the other of the answers, and thereby identify himself with some particular theology or Church. Mr Huxley prefers to regard himself as modern and scientific and emancipated; and raises the question in terms of unity and separateness, but it is, plainly, the same old superstitious conundrum disguised in philosophical motley.

### 3

The ambiguity which Mr Huxley displays when dealing with evil as a metaphysical problem is only an aspect of his incoherence—it would be inexact to use a more lenient word—on the crucial issue as to whether man is all of a piece with nature and society, related to changes in nature and society, or whether, on the contrary, he incarnates a timeless and hence supernatural and super-social spirit.

We have, to begin with, at least four separate statements on the subject. “It is will that decides how

and upon what subjects we shall use our intelligence." Secondly, "All that we are (and consequently all that we do) is the result of what we have thought." Then "knowledge is always a function of being. What we perceive and understand depends on what we are. . . . What we are depends . . . on the nature of the efforts we have made to realise our ideal and the nature of the ideal we have tried to realise." All of which seems to mean nothing more startling than this: Our will and being depend on thought and knowledge; and conversely, thought and knowledge depend on will and being.

Obviously, these pronouncements are circular and unenlightening. We cannot stop to examine them in detail, for it is even more important to ask whether will, thought, etc., function in an autonomous "private universe", or whether they are subject to the influence of the society of which the individual is a member.

On this point, too, we find Mr Huxley evading his responsibility to give us a clear and straightforward answer. At an early stage in the argument he had assured us, rightly, that "human nature"—and what we *are*, think, will and do constitutes our nature—"has, in fact, been made to assume the most bewilderingly diverse, the most amazingly improbable forms". And later on, we have such statements—again perfectly true—as that even metaphysical and theological systems have been fabricated by ruling classes to justify their ascendancy;<sup>1</sup> and that, "mentally", we "are related to and conditioned by the minds of our contemporaries and predecessors".

Are we, then, to conclude that man is integrally a

<sup>1</sup> We should point out in passing that the main features of Mr Huxley's own philosophy are drawn from these same ruling-class metaphysical and theological systems.

part of nature and society? Not at all, says Mr Huxley. For in man there resides a fragment of the eternal spirit; and though human nature has "changed profoundly", these changes are "rarely fundamental".<sup>1</sup> Why? Presumably because they leave untouched, among others, two "fundamental cravings": one, "the craving for righteousness", *i.e.*, for union with God, and two, "self-will", *i.e.*, resistance to the first craving—or, if we may call a spade a spade, original sin.<sup>2</sup> Most of us will find it hard to hold at the same time that human nature—what we *are*, what we will, think and do—depends on the kind of society we live in, and also on certain mysterious supernatural and super-social forces at work within us; but Mr Huxley easily gets over the difficulty by asserting that whereas the dependence is only superficial in the first instance, it is "more profound", hence decisive, in the second.

Indeed, Mr Huxley suggests, society and the evolution of society are subjects of secondary importance, occupying the attention only of "tyrants and would-be tyrants". They are remote abstractions. The individual, too, is an abstraction, for he is part of an interdependent Whole; but this Whole is not the community to which he knows he belongs, but the

<sup>1</sup> It is curious that Mr Huxley, who is so indignant with those who use the phrase "collective security", should quibble with words like "profound" and "fundamental".

<sup>2</sup> Since Mr Huxley has interpolated Spirit at the very commencement of biological evolution, it would follow that all creatures, including gnats and lice and leopards, suffer from these cravings, but he is discreetly silent on this issue. On the other hand, if he had delayed the début of Spirit, and these cravings, until the appearance of man, he would have involved himself in the arguments on Creation, Sin and Predestination which theologians have carried on with massive and sterile erudition for wellnigh two thousand years. *That*, as Mr Huxley doubtless realises, would be a highly embarrassing predicament to be in for a fashionable and cosmopolitan intellectual of the twentieth century.

universal and unchanging spirit, God, to whom Mr Huxley thinks he *ought* to belong. In so far as Mr Huxley admits the category of society at all, it is only as another name for the "mental-material conglomerate". "Biological evolution", it seems, has resulted in the world as we know it to-day. Society, and social evolution, have effected no significant change in the constitution of man. All men, at all times, from China to Peru, from 5000 B.C. to A.D. 2000, have desired the same "ideal" ends; but those "ideals" are still beyond our reach because—and this is the only reason that one is able to gather from the argument—their "passions" and their "self-will" (*i.e.*, original sin) have been too strong for them. "In the circumstances in which the human race now lives most of [the prevailing] intra-specific competition is not imposed by any kind of biological necessity, but is entirely gratuitous and voluntary."<sup>1</sup> This assimilation of the biological world to the world of man would only be valid, even on Mr Huxley's premises, if spirit, abstract free-will, and the twin cravings after righteousness and unrighteousness were imputed alike to both, to man and monkey, but there are apparently absurdities from which Mr Huxley will shrink; or they must be withheld from both—which would knock the bottom out of his philosophy. A third course is open to Mr Huxley. He may choose to tell us when and how the spirit entered the biological world, the world of nature—in which case he

<sup>1</sup> This is an amazing statement. It can only mean that capitalism, which is intra-specific competition, arose in response to biological necessity. No doubt economic historians would find the suggestion helpful. But, then, why did "biological necessity" pass over the rural organisations of India and China, and Medieval Europe? Is this another "brute fact", another instance of the element of "irreducible irrationality in the nature of things"?

must struggle with doctrines of the Incarnation, and abandon his mysticism and his immanentism-cum-transcendentalism. But, as usual, he prefers not to commit himself.

## 4

If, however, in relation to the fundamental (*i.e.*, spiritual) nature of man, society is an irrelevance, is there any point in trying to bring about changes in its structure? Yes, says Mr Huxley. Society can release man from "biological pressure", shelter him from the inclemencies of the (presumably, natural) environment, and supply him his physical wants. It can, moreover, if Mr Huxley's prescriptions were followed, alter the superficialities of his nature, suppress the secondary vices and develop the secondary virtues, thus sparing the individual who, by definition, longs for non-attachment and the mystical union with God, the anguish and travail that he would otherwise have to undergo in this quest.

How, then, is this new society, the society fit for mystics, to be achieved? The answer will be apparent if we re-state Mr Huxley's problem. There are two factors in man, one divine and the other natural. Outside man, there is a spiritual world, a Whole, God, and a natural world. Man's object is to transcend the natural factor and re-unite the divine in him with the Divine Whole "outside". To the attainment of this object, external nature (*i.e.*, society) can be either a help or a hindrance. External nature and man's "lower" nature are, however, parts of an interdependent physico-biological whole. Hence, if society is to be brought into line with the requirements of the spirit, it can and will be so only to the extent in which man's lower nature has been simi-



larly harmonised with his higher. The process cannot begin at the other end, in society; for society is the domain of necessity, physical and biological. In so far as these necessities influence man, they strengthen his "lower", animal and personal nature—they accentuate his separateness. It is precisely this which has to be transcended, and it can only be transcended by a spiritual act, an act of "free-will". By such repeated exercise of spirit, of free-will, man grows in spirituality, his lower nature becomes harmonised with his higher; and since his "lower" nature is part of an external world of physico-biological nature, the latter, too, is in the same degree harmonised with his higher nature—*i.e.*, in the same degree society is converted from a hindrance to a help. That is why, Mr Huxley insists, the spiritual or "non-attached" man alone can bring about the "better society"—which seems very profound until you remember that the whole purpose of the "better society" is to produce "non-attached" men.

## 5

That brings us to the end of our analysis of Mr Huxley's philosophy.

As many categories are invented as Mr Huxley finds convenient: Spirit, matter, mind, a "mental-material conglomerate" (*i.e.*, the world of biology), free-will, "self-will" (*i.e.*, original sin), the craving for righteousness, the craving for explanation, the unity of being, separateness and the tendency to emphasise separateness, evolution, good, virtue, evil, violence, an irreducible element of irrationality, etc., etc.

These concepts are for the most part unanalysed and unexamined, except in terms of each other. Good, for instance, is what makes for unity of being,



which in turn is love, which is a virtue. Does this really make it any the easier for us to know what "being good" actually involves in any given situation?

Not only are these concepts immobile and abstract but there is no sort of relationship between them except such as Mr Huxley chooses arbitrarily to establish. "It is not necessary to express an opinion on the relation between spirit and matter"—from an author whose entire work is based on the affirmation of the primacy of spirit!

But where your concepts are absolutes, the only relationship you can establish between them are relations of identity and difference: spirit *v.* matter; the craving for righteousness *v.* the craving that is "self-will"; good *v.* evil; the unity of all being *v.* the illusory separateness of all particular existents; good ends *v.* bad ends; good means *v.* bad means; violence *v.* non-violence.

If you want to exercise your, equally abstract, "free-will" in a situation that is presented in this form, you can but choose either the first term of the successive antinomies, or the second. To choose the first term of one antinomy and the second term of another is obviously illogical and contradictory.

Hence Mr Huxley is able to present his particular sequence of abstractions as a reasonable and right system for us to accept: Good means, good ends, the unity of all being, good *tout court*, the craving for righteousness, spirit. They are, as he would say, "organically related".

The only thing this philosophy does not do is to explain what happens to the other sequence. If I choose the craving for righteousness in me, I would undertake meditation and self-training, and become a mystic. But what happens to the other craving in

me—"self-will"? What happens to evil? Mr Huxley's answer is that evil is "self-destructive". It simply vanishes. Similarly, where society is concerned, if I become a mystic, if an unspecified number of us become mystics, war would disappear, the State would vanish.

This *process*, which to lesser minds appears to be of some importance, is precisely what Mr Huxley fails to enlighten us about. We are to suppose that it is one of the mysteries ingrained in the nature of things, a "brute fact", an ultimate "principle of irrationality".

It is inevitable that a philosophy, an intellectual "synthesis", which omits processes, and depreciates the significance of history and society should yield, however elaborately and lengthily it is expounded, nothing that is relevant to any historical and human situation. Its beginning and end are the same: empty verbiage.

## VII

### *Metaphysics : Its Social Function*

#### I

ANY solution to our problems that we attempt to evolve out of this philosophy must suffer from the pitiful inadequacies of pacifism or be condemned to total irrelevance—like Mr Huxley's "working-model of the ideal community", composed of mystics and saints pursuing their search for the Absolute Good with the help of the capital accumulated by munitions kings and motor magnates through mass murder and exploitation. On the other hand, we can only reach this philosophy and these futile solutions by resigning

ourselves, as Mr Huxley does, to the most flagrant inconsistencies and coolly evading every issue of importance that our argument presents to us.

We have already had occasion to refer to some of these evasions and inconsistencies. They often make it difficult to understand exactly what Mr Huxley is driving at. The supremacy of metaphysical beliefs as the "finally determining factor" in human behaviour is both asserted and denied. Violence is held to be an absolute, unqualified evil; yet the rigour of the censure is modified by the concession that a "very little violence" is legitimate in certain circumstances, and that anyhow you can neutralise the evil by displaying, after you have achieved your aim, "charity" and "justice" towards your victim. There is and has been, we are told, general agreement about the ideal ends. Yet few people in the contemporary world—neither communists, democrats nor fascists—seem to care much for them. Mr Huxley would probably suggest that they are all "eccentrics" in relation to the main tradition of Asiatic and European civilisation. Hegel and Machiavelli, he says, are "eccentrics in the sphere of political thought".<sup>1</sup> Hegel did not feed his mind on Plato, and Machiavelli had never read Livy or Polybius. It may be of course that what Mr Huxley intends to suggest is really that all thinkers from Plato to Marx were "eccentrics". That would leave us only Mr Huxley and the "prophets and mystics" to represent the "main tradition" of civilisation, of wisdom and righteousness.

In the chapter on "Decentralisation and Self-Government", Mr Huxley assures us that there is no prospect of these admirable reforms being carried

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, p. 6.

out so long as we have governments which value centralisation as a concomitant of military efficiency. In the context of militarism, he says, even "intrinsically desirable" schemes are doomed to futility. Discussing the methods of removing the psychological causes of war, however, he argues that these schemes which will not be adopted so long as militarism prevails, are precisely the schemes by which we are to be saved from militarism! "The application of the principle of self-government to industry and business should go far to deliver men and women . . . from the sense of helpless humiliation . . . and make life seem more interesting. . . ." <sup>1</sup> In the chapter on "The Planned Society", Mr Huxley maintains that quotas, tariffs, etc., are at least in part measures of "planning", designed by each government "for the benefit of its own subjects", that the principles of Free Trade have become obsolete, and that the ideal of self-sufficiency must be pursued by governments in the interests of peace. Nevertheless, in the chapter on "War", he deplores the fact that, although "economic warfare, carried on by competitive currency devaluations, by tariffs, quotas and export bounties is bound to lead sooner or later to military warfare", no government is willing to use "the excellent machinery specially designed for solving the world's economic problems" and restoring international trade to normality.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, while Mr Huxley is convinced that "economic sanctions mean war", and should therefore be opposed by "well-intentioned individuals", he does not hesitate in another context to recommend the boycott as a special form of non-co-operation consistent with pacifism. The Chinese, he points out, employed it against British goods; but he does not add that when

*Ends and Means*, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

the Chinese employed it against Japanese goods, Japan regarded the movement as a *causus belli*. Is there any essential difference between economic sanctions and a widespread and effective boycott?

## 2

Mr Huxley's whole thesis on war is in fact vitiated by a deep hiatus in the argument. He says: (1) The causes of war are psychological, political and economic. (2) Excellent machinery for preventing war through arbitration, conciliation, etc., is available. (3) The parties concerned are, however, unwilling to make use of this machinery because, presumably, of some spiritual defect in them. (4) Consequently, if we want to abolish war, we must proceed to eliminate this spiritual defect.

Now, Mr Huxley concedes that administrative and juridical machinery can successfully prevent the development of a dispute into open violence and warfare. "Opportunity helps to make the saint as well as the thief."<sup>1</sup> Thus the relevance of social machinery is admitted. Moreover, Mr Huxley agrees that some at all events of the disputes—and to-day perhaps the most dangerous among them—arise through defects in the existing economic and political systems, *i.e.*, in the existing social machinery—private ownership of the means of production, control of the State by the possessing classes, etc. When, therefore, we talk of machinery for preventing war, it is not enough to discuss and appraise only the machinery that comes into action, if at all, only after competing interests have clashed. We should go one step further, and consider the possibilities of improving or altering

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, p. 117.

the economic and political machinery the operation of which necessarily entails rivalry, competition and latent warfare. Such an alteration is clearly an integral aspect of the strategy of war prevention. There should accordingly be an additional link in Mr Huxley's chain of reasoning—say, between (2) and (3)—to provide that, while there may be excellent juridical machinery for preventing war, the political and economic machinery which makes for war is for that very reason not excellent, and should therefore be changed if we want to get rid of war. It is only by concealing this gap in his argument that Mr Huxley contrives to exhibit the removal of the psychological causes of war as the urgent task.

There is another peculiarity of Mr Huxley's mode of reasoning that we may point out in this connection. The political and economic interests which make for war, Mr Huxley admits, are cherished by the ruling classes. Yet when he comes to the question of the need for a change of psychology, he deftly evades the issue as to whose psychology it is that requires to be changed, and leaves us to infer that it is the psychology of the "community" or the "nation". As soon, however, as the method of bringing about the change is broached, Mr Huxley becomes precise again and deals with the position of "men and women in subordinate positions". Is it unreasonable to wish to correct the omission and consider the psychology of the ruling classes as well? And if the change in the psychology of "men and women in subordinate positions" is to be effected through a change in the context of their lives, through alterations in the structure of business and industry, is there anything fanatical in the suggestion that the change in ruling-class psychology should also be brought about through a

similar transformation of the social, political and economic context in which *they* live—*i.e.*, through the weakening and destruction of their position as a ruling, privileged and propertied class?

## 3

This obstinate refusal to concede the full significance of the actual organisation of society in its bearing on issues of war and peace characterises, equally, Mr Huxley's treatment of the more general problem of economic and social reconstruction. Here is the argument, stated briefly, in his own words:

“The other task [of the ‘devoted individuals’, the pacifists] is to cure themselves and the world of the prevailing obsession with money and power. Once more, direct approach to the sources of the individual will must be combined with the ‘preventive ethics’ of a social arrangement that protects from the temptations of avarice and ambition. What should be the nature of this social arrangement? . . . Machine production cannot be abolished; it is here to stay. The question is whether it is to stay as an instrument of slavery or as a way to freedom. A similar question arises in regard to the wealth created by machine production. Is this wealth to be distributed in such a way as to secure the maximum of social injustice or the minimum? Governments and private companies in the ordinary way of business are not specially concerned to discover the proper solutions of these problems. The task therefore devolves upon associations of devoted individuals.”<sup>1</sup>

The inconsequentiality of this argument is truly amazing. There is obsession with money and power,

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, p. 157.

says Mr Huxley. It must be cured. This is one problem. How is machine production to be organised and wealth to be distributed? This is another and, as Mr Huxley presents it, a totally different problem. But the obsession with money and power is not a "purely" psychological or autonomous phenomenon. Has not Mr Huxley himself told us that different social systems have impressed different patterns on human nature, that "opportunity" helps to make the good man as well as the thief? So "opportunity" and the social system must be considered to play their part in making the man who is obsessed with money and power as well as the man who is not so obsessed.

The question of curing this obsession is therefore necessarily also a question of altering the machinery, the opportunity which enables the obsession to develop. But changing the machinery means, in the nature of the case, creating—to the extent of the change—the new machinery which is to take the place of the old. How to organise machine production and distribute wealth is, thus, a problem inseparable in theory and in practice from the problem of curing the obsession with money and power. For purposes of analysis, no doubt, it is convenient to deal with this triple problem separately, in each of its aspects, but the course of action proposed, the solution, must be one which, in so far as it is effective, solves each aspect of the problem.

However, dividing the "economic problem", as he calls it, into two instead of three enables Mr Huxley to perform another feat of intellectual jugglery. His two problems are: (1) The existing psychology, the existing obsession that requires to be cured; and (2) How machine production ought "ideally" to be organised—what should be the right or ideal social organisation or system of opportunities. The vital



middle link, the central problem, the very key of the arch—the existing social organisation—is tacitly ignored. Observe the consequences:

(1) The relation of the present obsession to the present machinery, their mutual dependence, is obscured, if not suppressed.

(2) Through this illicit bifurcation, a problem that is at the same time psychological and organisational is presented as two distinct problems, one psychological and the other organisational.

(3) But these two problems, the psychological and the organisational, are not now on the same plane: the former is a present fact, the latter an “ideal” machinery the design of which is to be “found out” in a hypothetical future community.

(4) The relation between psychology and social machinery suppressed in the first instance is once more restored; but it is now a relation not between an existing psychology and an existing machinery, but a wholly illegitimate relation between an existing psychology and a hypothetical machinery. For Mr Huxley says, this hypothetical machinery is to cure the all too real “obsession” and spare men the temptations to avarice and ambition.

Once this ingenious and complicated feat of evasion has been achieved, Mr Huxley's other statements naturally follow. The hypothetical machinery cannot be brought into being by governments and private companies, for governments and private companies are vital parts of the existing machinery. There is no need to be surprised, as Mr Huxley is, that governments and private companies do not undertake these tasks “in the ordinary course of their business”. For the things with which they deal in the ordinary course of their business are precisely war, money and

power. How is a banker "in the ordinary course of his business" to modify his obsession with money, even if he wished to do so? And whether his obsession is with money or mysticism, so long as he remains a banker, the "ordinary course of his business" would work out its own consequences.

"Well-intentioned private individuals," Mr Huxley says, must undertake the task, and break the new ground that nobody else will break. By somehow emancipating themselves from the influence of and participation in the existing machinery, they must build up the hypothetical, "ideal" machinery. But even if we made the grotesque assumption that this perfect machinery has been brought into existence by some miracle, we should still be without an answer to the question how governments and ruling castes and private companies can be made to change their nature and characteristics. For the way to a better society, Mr Huxley says—and we should all agree—is obstructed by governments and bankers, by capitalism and imperialism. Is it not clear that, however many acres of new ground the private individuals break with their good intentions, the bankers and governments would continue to exist, and the road to the better society continue to be blocked? Mr Huxley's elaborate and grave preoccupations with ideal machinery, and the function and organisation of ideal communities, only take us further and further away from our problem and its solution.

Mr Huxley's method can best be illustrated by a simple analogy. There is sickness in a house because of bad drainage. Mr Huxley says he has a cure. What? To build a Model Town with perfect drainage, and people it with inhabitants drawn from we know not where, and healthy to start with. We

are only the more impressed by the adequacy of the panacea when we remember that Mr Huxley himself is an inmate of our hypothetical house, and hence stricken with the same sickness as afflicts the others.

## 4

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that Mr Huxley's philosophy is nothing more than an elaborate and fanciful construction, a dream-structure without any relation to reality. It has, in fact, a definite and unmistakable tendency. What that tendency is we may judge from some typical expressions of it. The State, Mr Huxley says, in so far as it is the instrument of a ruling class, "is obviously worthy of abolition".<sup>1</sup> He does not, however, tell us how this "obviously worthy" aim can be achieved. Instead, he tells us that, "by means of comparatively small changes in the existing systems of local and professional organisation, it would be possible to make almost every individual a member of some self-governing group. . . . In this way . . . the advantages of responsible and active freedom could be brought to all."<sup>2</sup> In other words, democracy and self-government, according to Mr Huxley, do not require that the people as a whole should be enabled to control the State machine. The present ruling class can therefore continue to be the dominant class, and the democratic ideal would be satisfied by the creation of autonomous local groups. (As usual, Mr Huxley overlooks the crucial question of the relation between such groups and a State controlled by a privileged minority.)

Similarly with regard to socialism. "The advantages of socialism," Mr Huxley writes, "can be

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

obtained by making changes in the management of large-scale units of production.”<sup>1</sup> The question of ultimate control is secondary.<sup>2</sup> Hence, the ownership of the means of production can continue to be monopolised by the capitalist class, and it is only partisanship and fanaticism to seek to dislodge that class from its privileged position. (Again, Mr Huxley overlooks the crucial question whether an industrial organisation in which the worker, as he suggests, “will help to decide how much and in what conditions he himself and his companions shall be paid”, is compatible with a system of private ownership and production for the market—*i.e.*, capitalism.)

On the question of war, as we have seen, Mr. Huxley’s fundamental conviction is that “war cannot be stopped by more war”. This is only Mr Huxley’s way of saying that China cannot stop the war that Japan is waging on her by endeavouring to resist that war. The very idea of defence against aggression is ruled out as a blunder and a crime. We must suppose, therefore, that if the British Government, for example, corrupted by the lust for power, as Mr Huxley might say, desires to extend its Indian Empire and engulf Afghanistan, it is the “duty” of the Afghans to spare the British army any trouble, and surrender themselves meekly and righteously. This, Mr Huxley declares, is “common sense”. It is at any rate a brand of that commodity that every imperialist and dictator would welcome.

## 5

Starting from the assumption that our problem is to create an “ideally perfect” society composed of

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

"ideally perfect" individuals, Mr Huxley devotes pages and pages of his book to the formulation of hypothetical problems and the enquiry into the ideally best solutions for them.<sup>1</sup> Nowhere does he candidly face the question as to the methods by which the institutions which dominate our lives can be changed. What he holds out to us as the ideal methods for this purpose—the cultivation of non-attachment or virtue, and the establishment of "model" communities—are indistinguishable from the ideal end which he proposes to us—since this also is a virtuous, non-attached life in an ideal society. It is, in any case, difficult to see how these alleged methods are relevant to any actual problem of our time. No sane man can believe that the pacifists' determination to die rather than use violence will foil an imperialist dictator's plans to conquer a country and enslave its people. No sane man can believe that a "model community" in Cornwall or Arizona could possibly have any effect on the financial and industrial operations of Big Business in Wall Street and the City. Imperialism and capitalism, private property and the State as the instrument of a privileged class—these, on Mr Huxley's own admission, are among the chief obstacles to a better society. Yet, instead of showing us how to get rid of them, he tells us in the end that it is, after all, unnecessary to get rid of them, and that their continued existence is not incompatible with the "better society".

<sup>1</sup> For instance, instead of telling us how to deal with the existing State and the existing ruling class, Mr Huxley expends considerable ingenuity in a consideration of the means by which a wholly imaginary—and immaculately conceived—"central political executive" is to be prevented from joining hands with an equally imaginary council of technical experts "to become the ruling oligarchy of a totalitarian State".

This is precisely the contention of all the leaders, political and intellectual, of the Right. Imperialist rulers inform their subjects in the colonies that they can enjoy "all the advantages of responsible and active self-government" under a system of local and regional autonomy, and that the cry for national independence is revolutionary and wicked.<sup>1</sup> And perhaps the first axiom of the social theory of fascism is that "the advantages of socialism" can all be had without a surrender of the institution of private property. These are strange affinities to discover in a thinker whose hatred of fascist brutality is beyond question. But their significance is in no way diminished when we consider some other features of Mr Huxley's philosophy: his persistent misrepresentation of socialist thought;<sup>2</sup> his complete indifference to the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. "This decentralisation of Indian nationalism is the hope of the British authorities and the fear of Congress. The British point of view, to put it gently, is that a lot of hot air will be cleared away if the provinces settle down each to its own job. The Congress view is that the national movement would be weakened by any slackening of central control. There is more than a suggestion that provincial autonomy was granted for this very purpose; but Congress leaders have no intention of allowing the movement to be bogged in piecemeal efforts before the great goal of independence is reached."—Richard Freund, the *Spectator*, December 31, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> "His (the Marquis de Sade's) books are of permanent interest and value because they contain a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* of revolutionary theory."—*Ends and Means*, p. 271. The whole of this passage is an example of Mr Huxley's grotesque misunderstanding and ignorance of "revolutionary theory".

It may not be irrelevant to add in this context that St. Theresa—who may be regarded as a great mystic and hence a perfect exemplar of "non-attachment"—took considerable pains to efface the evidences of her reading in order to create the impression, among gullible persons, that her mysticism was entirely spontaneous and spiritual, and underived from external sources, such as the study of religious literature. This is, to say the least, a strange form of "non-attachment." For details, see M. Etchegoyen: *L'amour divin, Essai sur les sources de sainte Thérèse*.

rôle of the working class in the contemporary world; his predilection to regard the workers in the mass as victims of indolence, irresponsibility and servility; his apparent conviction that there is nothing wrong or unjust in imperialism as a system of world organisation;<sup>1</sup> and his ignorant and malicious attacks on the Soviet Union, notwithstanding that his own argument requires a more favourable judgment of the Russian Revolution and its consequences.<sup>2</sup>

It would be foolish and perhaps unfair to insinuate that Mr Huxley is a fascist. His preoccupation with private virtues, his hankering for the mystical beatitudes would be derided by the true fascist. But would it not be equally foolish to deny that there is a remark-

<sup>1</sup> In the passage in which he advocates the re-distribution of colonies (*Ends and Means*, p. 120), it never occurs to Mr Huxley—for all his nice sense of ethics and his passion for correct terminology—to mention such a small point as that the ownership of colonies means the ownership as well of the human beings inhabiting the colonies. Among the reasons he offers in support of this measure are that it would “allay the envy and resentment” of the strong powers, and “solve the, at present, almost insoluble problem of imperial defence”. Not a word about the condition of the colonial peoples, but concern for the safety of the Empire and the good-will of the Dictators. Not a word about the colonial peoples’ claim to freedom but anxiety to promote “justice” by internationalising their ownership. Yet we are assured that this is a doctrine which exalts Right above Might.

<sup>2</sup> In respect of public health, for instance, and education and material well-being in general, even hostile critics of the Soviet Union recognise that conditions are now vastly better than they were before the Revolution. On Mr Huxley’s theory, therefore, we are entitled to hold that “compensatory acts of justice, charity and non-violence” have been performed sufficient at the least to neutralise the violence of the Revolution. Certainly, the improvement effected in these respects by the Soviet authorities within a single generation is far greater than anything that could be ascribed to the “compensatory acts of British administrators in India” during the last hundred years. Nevertheless Mr Huxley propagates the mischievous view that the Soviet Union is a plague spot, and leaves us to assume that the British Empire is on the whole pacific and just.



able coincidence between Mr Huxley's conclusions on the main political and economic issues of our time and the views of those who, whether they are avowedly fascists or not, are definitely hostile to a radical change of the prevailing social structure—with the views, that is, of the privileged and possessing classes? It may be objected that Mr Huxley's pacifism shows that this coincidence is only accidental and of no great significance. We should not forget, however, that the doctrine of pacifism is not addressed to the militarists and the millionaires, the governments and dictators who preside over and defend the present organisation of society; nor does anyone expect *them* to take it seriously. Pacifism is addressed mainly to certain sections of the dispossessed, the middle classes and the workers, who may wish to bring about a change; and in so far as it confuses their ideas and cripples their action, it would be playing its part in the defence of the existing régime.

In all its aspects, therefore, Mr Huxley's philosophy—whatever his own hopes and wishes—tends unmistakably to strengthen the conservative and reactionary influences at work to-day and to weaken the forces which are striving for a more democratic and equitable order by misleading them as to the actual issues involved and exhorting them to take a course which, in relation to these issues, amounts to inaction. Stripped of its fine phrases, its pretensions to eternal truth and its ostentatious rectitude, the philosophy of idealism is seen once more, as in every past age, to safeguard the interests of the ruling class and paralyse the energies of its opponents; to defend the lords of the money-bags and the machine-guns who are driving us all towards death and unspeakable degradation.



## PART II

We have in the practice of science the prototype for all human action. The task which the scientists have undertaken—the understanding and control of nature and of man himself—is merely the conscious expression of the task of human society. The methods by which this task is attempted, however imperfectly they are realised, are the methods by which humanity is most likely to secure its own future. In its endeavour, science is communism.

J. D. BERNAL.



## PART II

### VIII

#### *How Man Came To Be*

##### I

IN a world that insistently, peremptorily, calls for action, our problem is to know how to act, what choice to make. Even Mr. Huxley, whose world-view is so entirely abstract and verbal, offers it to us only as a justification of the line of action, or inaction, that it is his object to recommend to us. Any alternative course of action should have its basis in a world-view of similar amplitude, though more coherent, more in accordance with reality, with the facts of society and nature.

Let us start with a proposition on which there is perhaps less disagreement than on any other—that man is the product of biological evolution. What are we to understand by this?

It is clear that it means, in the first place, that life originally appeared on earth amid conditions in which life was absent. Before life ever was, there was non-living or inanimate matter. Some people hold that, while this is true, life represents a unique something—a principle, shall we say—apart from matter, and that its origin in material circumstances must in the last analysis be attributed to the intervention of an immaterial and supernatural power. There is, however, an undeniable identity between the physical and chemical phenomena that occur in living matter and those that take place in non-living matter. Many phenomena characteristic of cellular life can be

influenced by physico-chemical means, can thereby even be reproduced experimentally. Indeed, the dividing line between living and non-living matter has now been proved to be so shadowy that it is no longer possible to maintain that life is totally distinct from matter.<sup>1</sup> We are not, however, entitled to say that life and matter are identical: their observed behaviour would make such an identification absurd; only that life is a form, or "mode of existence" of matter.

The originality, the specific character of life consists not only in the fact of assimilation—the fact that non-living matter is absorbed and converted into living matter—but also in the fact that, throughout this process of change, the living being maintains a certain recognisable stability. It continues to be itself, in spite of the changes that its existence entails. Its distinctive mark is thus to be itself and simultaneously other than itself.<sup>2</sup> Let us take a cell, for example. It is living matter; it is composed of elements which, taken one by one are merely material, *i.e.*, chemical, substances. None of them by itself, however essential it may be, constitutes life. It is the totality of their interactions within a specific material structure which "endows" the cell with life; and not only the totality of these interactions, but the interactions between the cell and its environment. The real life of the cell is, accordingly, the result of a complex co-ordination of chemical reactions within and without. And in this respect, what applies to the cell applies also to multicellular organisms, man and the animals whose existence involves, similarly, not the presence of some

<sup>1</sup> See Essay by N. W. Pirie, in *Perspectives in Biochemistry*, Cam. Univ. Press, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, p. 42.

We must observe, next, that the transformation of species brought about by mutations and natural selection is a transformation not only of their physical features, their structure—internal and external—but of their behaviour as well, *i.e.*, of their power to deal with the environment. In the sense that the organism is able to act more and more effectively upon, and be less and less determined in its action by the environment, there is progress. On the basis of the available evidence, we are safe in holding that, while it is usual—and necessary, for purposes of analysis—to distinguish between reflexes, tropisms, instinct and intelligence as constituting an ascending scale, they are not to be regarded as essentially dissimilar and inflexible categories. They denote, at different levels and in different circumstances, a single activity, described by some psychologists as “generalisation”.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, even uni-cellular organisms have been proved to repeat or persist in reactions which are no longer necessitated by the environment.<sup>2</sup> It seems probable, therefore, that the difference between reflexive instinctive and intelligent action is connected with the degree of facility with which automatisms acquired in one situation are replaced by others when the situation alters. At a certain level of the development of organic life—even at the level of the earthworm, for instance—such variation of behaviour occurs in circumstances which justify us in asserting the presence of what in the case of higher organisms would undoubtedly be described as memory and anticipation. These capacities function in the context of a vaguely apprehended external situation; and the apprehension

<sup>1</sup> Verlaine, *Psychologie comparée* (Centrale du P.E.S. de Belgique, 1933).

<sup>2</sup> H. Wallon, *A la lumière du marxisme* (Paris, 1935).

develops subsequently into precise knowledge to the extent in which it facilitates the reproduction of a particular form of behaviour. Memory, anticipation, knowledge and action are thus indissolubly connected with each other, and all four with the structure of the organism. The circuit between an external situation and the response of an organism comprises manifold operations, even if we take simple instances. In proportion as the organism concerned becomes capable of more varied and complex operations, the number of ramifications in which its activity could flow increases rapidly, and may thus appear to be more or less emancipated from external contingencies.<sup>1</sup>

Evolution, then, is a process of interaction between the organism and its environment whereby, if the environment is modified, there occurs, too, a structural and psychic development of the organism.

2

At what stage of this process can man be said to have emerged?

We have, to start with, the elementary fact that there are anatomical and physiological resemblances between man and the apes. The correctness of the inference that they are both descended from a common stock is proved by the fossilised remains of intermediate types which have been discovered in different countries. These extinct species show, however, not that there has been a steady and uniform progress in a straight line, but a series of irregular and, as it were, haphazard transformation linking *homo sapiens* with the primeval anthropoids. The human race, as we know it, is a biological type to which there have been earlier approximations.

<sup>1</sup> Wallon, *A la lumière du marxisme*.

If the difference between organisms is one of structure, it is also a difference in the way in which they act upon the environment. The transformation of the ape into man means, accordingly, the transformation or development of a particular mode of dealing with nature. Apart from the brain and the nervous system, the physical basis of this transformation is mainly the vertical posture, and the hands which are thereby freed for the manipulation of natural objects.<sup>1</sup> The human being, or the anthropoid, exists at this stage by the appropriation and accumulation of what the environment has to offer him. From this stage to the next, when pieces of wood or stone are used to help the hands, it is but a step. At first these materials are utilised in the form in which they are found, but soon they are *fashioned* in accordance with need and necessity. The *tool* thus comes into being; and with its appearance man ceases to act upon nature as himself a force of nature—as all other creatures do. Instead, an intermediate agency is brought into operation, to kill or to protect, to acquire food and obtain shelter. Not content with gathering the means of existence, man begins to produce them, *i.e.*, obtains means of existence which would not exist at all in nature but for him.

This change in the relations of the organism with nature results at the same time in a modification or development of its capacity for “generalisation”, of its “mind”. The anthropoid’s apprehension of an objective situation becomes increasingly precise and concrete; the interconnection between events, things and its own organic needs is dimly perceived; and the animal, man, originally a part of living material nature, gradually detaches himself from that nature, and in proportion as his activities multiply—in proportion,

<sup>1</sup> Perrier, *la Terre avant l’histoire*, p. 382.

that is, as one need engenders another and leads to ever more complex and controlled operations on nature—he is able to see in his “mind”, with growing clarity and exactitude, the relation between a want and the external conditions of its satisfaction. In short, the change-over from a passive adaptation to nature to an active exploitation of it—of which the material intervention of tools is at once the expression and the condition—signifies the transition from “animality” to “humanity”. Nature is modified, not under a mechanical impulse, but so as to produce an anticipated result. Consciously held ends begin to govern the character of the action performed, and the practical futility or effectiveness of the action leads to a more correct knowledge of external reality. This knowledge, however, is not an inert intellectual possession; it flows into, and shapes subsequent action, not only modifying nature, but developing and improving the tools which are employed for the purpose. To the extent in which nature is dominated by these means, and necessity subdued, there arises in the animal, man, the consciousness of power, of liberty.

Neither of these twin processes, of technological and psychological development, takes place of course anywhere except in the *milieu* which is society. The transformation of the anthropoid into man is the transformation of the anthropoid herd into the human herd. But the herd is not simply the passive object of transformation. “The technological development necessarily assisted the closer drawing together of the members of the society since because of it instances of mutual support of common action became more frequent and the advantage of this mutual activity became clear to each separate member.”<sup>1</sup> On the

<sup>1</sup> Engels, *The Rôle of Labour in the Process of the Humanising of Apes*.



other hand, the existence of the herd, the collectivity, reacted on the technological and psychological processes and accelerated them, as, for instance, most notably, through the development of phonetic language out of the crude gestures and ejaculations which had previously served as the medium of communication. Little by little, in the measure in which they had something to say, *i.e.*, in the measure in which their action over nature developed, men became articulate and learnt to speak. The influence of language on the formation of concepts, and of the latter, again, on knowledge and action scarcely needs to be mentioned.<sup>1</sup>

So the origin of human society, of man, and of technology are three aspects of what we must regard as a single event in the evolutionary development of the world. None of them can be understood except in relation to the others, for each is what the others have helped to make it. But the material foundation upon which this interaction takes place, and which determines the character of this interaction, is the indispensable technological factor—the means of production—which mediates between social man and nature.

## IX

### *The Anatomy of Society*

#### I

To find our way, through this twentieth-century world, it is not enough to know how, at the end of zoological evolution, man and human society came to be. We have to know, also, how society works, how it maintains itself and how it changes.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. H. Berr, Preface to J. de Morgan's *Prehistoric Man*.

The objection that society is merely an abstraction hardly deserves to be noticed. It is obvious that we, you, I, Tom, Dick, and Harry did not drop from the skies fully equipped with desires, theories, and "ideal ends". Before we were born, society existed—individuals with feelings and thoughts of their own. But society is not only anterior to us: it is in a sense the very air we breathe. Our lives are linked with those of others in countless ways, and however desperately we may try to break these bonds and sink into a private universe of spirituality, we must, perforce, rise to the surface now and then for a snatch of food.

Society, then, is an inescapable, though not a visible and tangible reality. It is, moreover, an extremely, even bewilderingly complex reality. There are relations, some organised and others unorganised, between individuals, between groups, between groups and individuals, and it is the totality of these innumerable exchanges and cross-exchanges which constitutes society. If we are to have any clear views at all on the subject, we must endeavour to unravel this tangle, to discriminate between the less and the more important of the numerous strands that go to its making. We must, in other words, seek some particular angle from which to approach society, to discover what is fundamental in it and what secondary.

Is it not obvious, when the question is posed in this form, that the fundamental activity in society must be the economic, since, though often ignored, it forms the permanent basis of all other activities? In some capacity or other, all men of necessity participate in the economic life of society, the basic type of social relation without which all the others would be inconceivable. Societies arise, as we saw, only in the process of the interaction of the organism with its environment;

and society cannot continue to exist save by the continuance of that process. Now, what is this central process of interaction with nature in our society, in any society, save the process of labour by which men, singly or in groups, establish contacts with nature and adapt the energy and the products of nature to human use? Whether we approach the question from the standpoint of the internal relations which prevail in society or the relation of society as a whole with external nature, we must face the fact that the process of production is of vital significance. "We must seek the anatomy of society in its economy."

We shall see presently how from this standpoint it is possible to formulate a coherent view of society, embracing its manifold aspects, and hence also a view of the conduct that is incumbent upon us in society. But let us note first that if we reject this approach, we come up against insuperable difficulties. Shall we start with human nature, with man's motives and psychology? How, then, can we account for the undoubted fact that human nature, motives and psychology have varied from time to time, from society to society, almost from individual to individual? If we admit that human nature has been moulded by history, and yet cling dogmatically to the belief that there is an unchanging "spiritual", "metaphysical" essence in man which must serve as a clue and a criterion in all social problems, we shall be opening the door to every variety of hocus-pocus. What is more, we should be asserting in flat defiance of the facts that we know nothing about the emergence of man, since we know nothing about the time and manner in which a divine something came to be implanted in an animal body. If, then, it is useless to start from human nature, we must agree that it is equally useless to

begin with some particular aspect of the social complex—the political, legal or religious systems, and the beliefs and doctrines each of them embodies—for we shall still be without any answer as to why they are what they are, and why they have assumed such diverse forms in the course of history. We should at best have those vicious circles in which political developments, for instance, are explained in terms of the individual's motives, the prevailing morality or some mystical "spirit", and this latter again ascribed either to politics or to a super-social influence. Max Weber and, after him, scores of other writers have explained Eastern culture in terms of Eastern religion, as though the religions were invariable and constant factors and did not themselves require to be accounted for.

There is a third course open to us. We may decline to adopt any "simplification" whatever and, with Mr Huxley, look upon every conspicuous element in society as equally important—in which case we must abandon the conception of society as a coherent system and assume that it is a disorderly clash between a number of independent forces, some arbitrarily designated "good" and some "bad". Mr Huxley waxes indignant with those who discuss "society" in general; yet he deplures the fact that the social sciences are not studied more widely in our universities. Is it not obvious that a social science is possible only if we accept the validity of the concept of society? That it is indispensable is tacitly acknowledged even by Mr Huxley, since he makes frequent use of the word; although, as is to be expected of one who does not "believe" in it, uncritically. We conclude therefore that society is real, and that it is necessary to have an idea, a theory concerning its nature. The penalty of not formulating such a view consciously is to

succumb to every fallacy that accident has obtruded into our minds. Secondly, if we are to understand a complex and fluctuating reality, we must begin by finding within it an element or factor which affects the whole system and is at the same time relatively stable. Thirdly, a pervasive and constant element which meets this requirement is provided by the economic processes that are carried on in society, the way in which men live, feed, house and clothe themselves—in short, the prevailing mode of production.

## 2

Most of us, perhaps, are inclined to take these considerations for granted, but it is only by consciously affirming them and working out their implications that we can formulate a coherent outlook and, on the basis of that outlook, a line of action for ourselves.

If we concede that the economic approach to society is reasonable—that it is in fact the only reasonable approach—we must go on to distinguish between two sets of objective facts and recognise that there is a necessary connection between them. We have, to begin with, the material means of production—engines, mines, machines, factories, etc. Machines and factories are not of course to be found in every society, but in one form or another, tools have existed in all societies. It is the emergence of the tool at a certain stage of the evolution of life on earth that marks the dividing line between biological development and the history of society. An animal reacts to its environment, adapts itself to nature, through its bodily organs. Man, however, interposes a thing, or a complex of things, “which serves as a conductor of his activities. He makes use of the mechanical, physical and chemical properties of some substances in order to make other

substances subservient to his aims. . . . Thus nature becomes one of the organs of his activity, one that he annexes to his bodily organs, adding stature to himself in spite of the Bible.”<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, as we have noticed above, there is a basic pattern in society arising out of the fact that human beings co-operate in the production and reproduction of their means of existence. Robinson Crusoes are figments of the eighteenth-century imagination. Men have always lived together, *i.e.*, in society, and have had relations with one another; and it is because these relations are qualitatively different from an aggregate of individuals considered as “isolates” that we are justified in regarding society as a whole that is not identical with the sum of its parts. Of these relations, endless in number and staggering in their complexity, there are some which exact our special attention: they are the relations in which, in one way or another, all men are necessarily involved, the relations whereby, to put it bluntly, they keep alive. It is the persistence of these relations which imparts to society, however chaotic it may appear, the aspect of an orderly system.

Now to ask whether there is any connection between these two sets of objective facts—the economic, and specifically, the production relations, and the technical bases of society, the material means of production—is almost superfluous. These means, the tools, instruments, engines, etc., do not exist by themselves. They have significance only in the context of the human beings who use them, and the relations between human beings must inevitably conform to the character of the forces of production which obtain at any given time. A moment’s reflection is enough to convince us of this. The technology underlying small-scale production

<sup>1</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 199–200.

would manifestly be incompatible with the circumstances of the modern world. Similarly, it is impossible to imagine the feudal culture, shall we say, of ancient China flourishing on the bases of the productive forces available to-day. Why, and in what circumstances, the forces of production themselves vary is a question we need not raise at this stage, for whatever may be the answer, it is clear that production relations, the organisation of society in its main features, must be adapted to or conditioned by the prevailing technology. Essentially, one technological system varies from another in its efficiency (which is, of course, a function as well of the quality of the labour applied). The difference, in other words, is a difference in the degree or level of productivity. To affirm that the production relations depend upon the forces of production is, consequently, to affirm that these relations, which in their totality constitute the economic structure of society, depend upon the level of the productive forces, which is a measurable, material quantity.

Of the different types of production relations, one in particular is, from every point of view, of decisive significance; they are the relations bound up with ownership, with the distribution in law of the means of production among the different members of society—class relations. It is, unhappily, necessary to remark at this point that the class distinction, so-called, is not a myth created by “ill-aerated sociologists” and exploited by subversive agitators. The distinction denotes the fact, which surely no one can deny, that where the forces of production in society are concerned some of us are in a position, while the rest are not, to determine when and how they shall be employed. Now these class relations themselves offer us a striking proof of the overriding importance of the forces of



production. When a new technology is developed—or, which amounts to the same thing, invades a society where a primitive system is in force—not only are large numbers thrown out of work, but—as for example in the case of the handloom weavers and spinners of India—their status in society is altered, and they may find themselves reduced from the position of independent producers to that of wage-earners.

Shifts in the class structure can thus be traced to the action of productive forces. Might it not be, then, that the very origin of classes was similarly conditioned? It is obvious that so long as the means of existence had to be obtained by the cunning use of sticks and stones, there was no possibility of the emergence of classes. For that technology had to develop to a point where a surplus, however small, was regularly produced. It was in the course of the neolithic period, when the earliest tribes had emerged out of the yet more primitive human horde that agriculture, stock-raising and barter made their first appearance on earth and enabled human labour power to produce more than what was necessary for its maintenance. Within the patriarchal household was then born the germ of a difference—between slave and master: serf and baron: ryot and zamindar: coolie and sahib: wage-earner and capitalist; between labour-power and ownership. This incipient cleavage in the human race was subsequently widened and poisoned by violence and fraud, indeed it supplied the motive to war and conquest;<sup>1</sup> it led to the dissolution of the clans and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. “In order to be able to plunder, there must be something to plunder, *i.e.*, there must be production. And even the method of plunder is determined by the method of production. A stock-jobbing nation cannot be robbed in the same manner as a nation of shepherds.” Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 288.



announced the advent of more advanced social forms. But leaving aside all these aspects of the question, is it not clear that that cleavage was only made possible, was determined, by a certain enhancement of the level of the productive forces? <sup>1</sup>

From that day to this, every civilisation has been divided into two major classes. How are we to account for this? Shall we follow Mr Huxley, and invoke mysterious and eternal entities, and assume that the lust for power, on the one hand, and "the vice of irresponsible obedience", on the other, have been at work? That would indeed be gratuitous, for we know it was not these "spirits" which in the first instance created the cleavage. Once more, we must look for the reason in the state of the productive forces. Their development in class society not only gave the opportunity for the exploitation of man by man; it involved at the same time a diversification of social culture, a more complex division of labour than had existed formerly. And every increase in the level of production has since been accompanied by a correspondingly greater specialisation which, at one stage, threatened to convert the individual himself into the "automatic motor of a fractional operation". Such specialisation, however minute and intricate, rests ultimately on the broad distinction between those who do manual work, and the others, the privileged few, who direct labour, conduct trade, safeguard common interests and in time come to occupy themselves with the arts and sciences. Now, it is easy to understand why this dichotomy should have persisted throughout the history

<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to concede that modern sociologists like F. Oppenheimer who treat violence or the "political factor" as an autonomous and decisive element in the historical process have in the least shaken the magistral arguments of Engels in his three chapters on "The Force Theory" in *Anti-Duhring*.

of civilisation. For throughout that history, the productive forces, in spite of successive expansions, remained at a level which required the all but complete absorption of multitudes in manual labour. The technical means did not exist which alone could have released the masses of men for participation in the general affairs of society, in non-manual activities. Only when these means have been forged, as they have been to-day, following on centuries of development, does it become materially possible to break down this age-old division and assert that a class society is a tragic anachronism.

Such in essentials is the outline of what we are entitled, nay bound, to regard as the foundations of society. Their existence does not in any manner depend on whether we please to acknowledge it or not. They consist in part of the material apparatus of production and, closely linked with it, the division of labour in society; and, in part, of the relations between individuals, pre-eminent among which are class relations, themselves conditioned by the level of the productive forces.

## X

### *The Social Heritage*

#### I

MAN does not live by bread alone. Economic activities do not exhaust the scope and variety of social phenomena. There are many others: religion, art, literature, science, philosophy, etc.—all those which are held to fall within the domain of culture. Are these facts and systems, which may be described in general

as “ideological”, intellectual, spiritual, to be explained in the context of such prosaic realities as means of production and production relations?

To withhold an affirmative answer to this question is to revive the same tedious perplexities that beset us at an earlier stage of the argument. What other answer can we give? What else is there that could be dragged in to provide an explanation? Obviously, we cannot be content with the simple assertion that art, for instance, arises because it is, to adopt one of Mr Huxley's favourite expressions, in “the nature of things” to engender art. Shall we say, then, with Taine, that art reflects social psychology? No; for social psychology is itself one of the cultural manifestations that we set out to understand. Similarly, the attempt to interpret moral ideas in terms of religious beliefs and religious beliefs, again, in terms of intellectual and scientific development—as in the works of Lecky—leaves us in the dark as to the origin and circumstances of this development. Thus, when we seek to explain one ideological factor by reference to another, we involve ourselves in a tautology which evades precisely that of which we seek elucidation—the determining conditions of ideological activity.

In order to avoid this difficulty, we have to resort to that over-worked phrase, “human nature”. What is more, since we will not admit that these lofty spiritual preoccupations have anything to do with economics, and men are under a necessity at the least to “dabble” in economics, we are constrained to impute to individuals certain indefectible instincts which remain uncontaminated by the sordid activities into which their animality leads them. There is a religious instinct or “sense” in man—the “sense of holiness”—says Mr Huxley, echoing Rudolf Otto,

the German theologian; and presumably we are at liberty to postulate philosophical, scientific, literary and æsthetic instincts as well.

This is a very convenient method. Nevertheless, we must regard it as unsatisfactory because, in the first place, even if we assume the existence of these instincts, we have no means of knowing, for instance, why—in the case of religion—monotheism should have prevailed at one time and polytheism at another; or why this alleged instinct should crave for blood amongst some peoples and self-abnegation and *tapas* amongst others. Secondly, it requires us to believe, contrary to all the available evidence, that man is of a dual nature, one earthly, material and changeable, the other unaffected by time and spiritual in essence. To admit this belief is to assert that God, a supreme spirit, Mumbo-Jumbo is at work in nature, and that everything we regard as pertaining to the mind, everything that is ordinarily taken to distinguish man from animals must be attributed in the last analysis to a secret energy imparted to the human race by we know not what power. This is merely a roundabout and not altogether candid way of saying that it is impossible to explain these phenomena, that the growth of religions and sciences must for ever remain a mystery.

There is, however, no need to resign ourselves to this negative conclusion. On the contrary, there is every reason to affirm that culture, the whole edifice of law, morality, art and science, rests upon the material foundations of society, and varies in accordance with variations in the latter. The material foundations of society consist, as we have seen, in the economic relations between human beings, relations themselves dependent upon the given level of the productive forces. A few simple considerations will help to make

the point clear. It is customary to draw a distinction between savage and civilised society. The distinction signifies the fact that what we have described as cultural or spiritual phenomena richly characterise one society, while they are to be found, if at all, only in a primitive form in the other. What could account for the difference except this—that the productive forces are primitive in the first instance and advanced in the second? Besides, it is elementary that cultural activities of a certain type can only arise when some, at least, of the individuals in the community are able to command the requisite leisure—and is this not a function of the economic system? We may state the position in yet another way, by raising a hypothetical question. Is it possible, in imagination, to dissociate the intellectual phenomena of an epoch from their socio-economic bases and affix them to another period? Can we, for example, conceive of the general theory of relativity flourishing in the days of Alfred the Great? Or the writings of the ancient Hindu jurists modifying, in more than a negligible degree, the social philosophies of the twentieth? Clearly, the answer in these and similar cases must be, No.

These transpositions seem intrinsically absurd because—if we may use the analogy without personifying society—they sever “mind” from “body” and re-associate them in an arbitrary manner. They assume that mental processes occur spontaneously, in a realm of their own, in what a modern platonist has called the “realm of essence”. The assumption, however, is manifestly untenable. We are dealing with human beings, and human beings exist, are real, only by virtue of the relations they sustain with their fellows. If the brain and the nervous system are a necessary basis of their psychology and spirituality, no less necessary is

the basis provided by their active and inescapable participation in social life. Indeed, their ideas, ideals, arts and beliefs reflect or arise out of such participation. Now the system of inter-relationships which the participation implies has a degree of stability: it persists: it is transmitted, in more or less the same form, from one generation to another. Hence the principles and categories, the laws, religions, and psychological tendencies that it has stimulated and called into existence acquire the coherence and contours of a determinate culture. Hence the behaviour patterns, and the corresponding ideological patterns of a hunting tribe differ from those of a pastoral people, and the latter, again, from what we may observe in industrial society. Hence, too, the general truth epitomised in the formula that social existence, the basic inter-relationships evoked by a given state of the productive forces, determine the quality of the social consciousness.

## 2

The dependence of cultural phenomena on the extant social conditions and the underlying technology is perhaps most clearly in evidence in those cases where we are able to trace them back to their origin. Science, for instance, regarded as theoretical activity in general, is in its beginnings inextricably bound up with, and no more than an extension of the practical activity imposed upon man in the course of his contact with nature; and it is now commonly recognised that important branches of science, astronomy and mechanics in particular, arose and developed in direct response to the requirements of production (agriculture, handicraft, navigation). Similarly, when we turn to religion, it seems certain that nothing that could be described as

such is to be found at the inception of human history. Biological facts such as birth and death, shadows and reflections, sleep and the vivid irreality of dreams were doubtless the immediate experiences which led to animism, the belief in spirits, in the existence of immaterial counterparts to material objects; but this aboriginal and essential form of religion did not take shape in the mind of man until he had emerged from the primitive horde, *i.e.*, until his productive capacities had been enhanced, in however slight a measure, and by reason of that very enhancement he began simultaneously to be aware of the inscrutable might of nature and his own unqualified subjection to it. Religion was thus the expression in ideological terms of the ignorance and helplessness of the archaic, undifferentiated human group.<sup>1</sup>

With the dissolution of such groups, the class character of society begins to exert a formative influence on culture, equal, if not superior, to that of the productive forces. The makers of culture are no longer those who are mainly engaged in manual labour, but the privileged class and its adherents. Economic privilege gives them the leisure, as it imposes on them the obligation, to discharge the general functions of which society stands in need. These circumstances at the same time contribute to create, and insensibly widen, a rift between the psychology of the two classes.

<sup>1</sup> The older school of anthropologists isolated primitive man from his social context, and tended to see in religion only the result of his musings on life and death. The impulse to these philosophical endeavours was, accordingly, considered to be innate to the mind. More recently, a theory has been put forward that animism, or the belief in spirits was preceded by "animatism", or the belief in a universal and impersonal spirit, or force, called "Mana". It is impossible in the space at our disposal to go into the details of this theory or explain why it is unsatisfactory.



The ideologies that then come into being reflect not only the limitations of the dominant technology but the mode of thought and the special interests of the dominant class, upon which devolve the tasks of theoretical formulation. Greek science, for instance, as that of the ancient Hindus, contains much that is naïve and vague; it is to be expected in view of the low level of the techniques then prevalent. They are likewise associated with philosophies which deprecate merely utilitarian activities—the province of slaves and *sudras*—in order to exalt the virtues of pure contemplation. By means of such disinterested intellectual effort, metaphysical, legal, and ethical systems are evolved, which have the additional merit of demonstrating the eternal rightness of the existing social order. Meanwhile, the roots of religion find a fresh source of nourishment. The growth of the productive forces helps to dispel the once overpowering mystery of nature, but in the same measure introduces mystery into society by complicating its processes and obscuring its relationships. Civilised man reacts as blindly to social stresses as the savage to the laws of nature. To him religion comes with its blessings and its consolations. It tells him he is not really blind; if only he would look within and upward, a purer, more penetrating sight would be given unto him. And the more blind he is, the more readily he succumbs to these illusions.

To see in ideologies nothing more than the reflection of class interests and the state of the productive forces would, however, be a fallacy. It would be, in effect, to overlook the significance of the increasing division of labour in society, which results in multiplying the forms not only of economic, but of all other activities as well. Law, politics, philosophy, science, religion,



art and literature become differentiated as distinct departments of cultural life, each with an organisation and a personnel of its own. However shadowy the organisation and fluctuating the personnel, the emergence of these specialisations leads in time to the development of special traditions, special disciplines and special standards. The connection between important phases of culture and the underlying socio-economic system is, in consequence, obscured, and the various specialisations acquire a limited autonomy. It becomes possible to pursue any of them, art or science, shall we say, without reference to the basis of the social structure as a whole, for each has inherited from the preceding generation its special material and its special method of dealing with that material. Similarly, jurists and theologians and moralists and all the varieties of intellectuals have their several systems of principles and categories which exempt them from the need to admit any conscious dependence on the actual relation between things and persons in society; systems of thought which allow them infinite scope for analysis and amplification and the search for "truth";<sup>1</sup> which in the end enable philosophers to declare that the verities discovered in this abstract, speculative process are the only verities.

We may hold in the light of these considerations that there are three unequal forces which go to the shaping of the different phases of culture: (1) the prevailing technology; (2) the mode of thought, psychology and interests of the ruling class, and (3) the material and

<sup>1</sup> "Since in each particular case, the economic facts must assume the form of juristic motives in order to receive legal sanction, and since, in so doing, consideration of course has to be paid to the whole legal system already in operation, the consequence is that the juristic form is made everything and the economic content nothing." Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 65.

the laws of development peculiar to each such phase. This somewhat schematic presentation, however, fails to take account of a fact of very considerable significance, viz., that ideological activity does not always exhaust its potency within the limits of its own specialisation. It has repercussions; its influence spreads to other, and apparently even remote, fields. It is, for instance, common knowledge in these days that there is a close interconnection between natural science, philosophy, religion and the social sciences. The different phases of culture are thus not only determined by, but themselves to some extent determine the rest, either directly or indirectly. They are not simply resultants, but active agencies.

Can it be suggested, then, that their effectiveness is confined to the cultural superstructure, that they cannot reach down to the foundations of society and affect the state of the productive forces and the economic system built thereon? No; for into whatever metaphysical empyrean certain ideologies may occasionally soar, they not infrequently mould the minds of men, their ideals and codes of behaviour, and thereby either consolidate or weaken existing relationships; while, if we take science, as the theoretical activity directly concerned with productive practice, it may lead either to a retardation, as in antiquity, or an acceleration, as in modern times, of technological development. There is, in short, a ceaseless interaction between the component parts of society, a complex process of mutual determination through which, at any given time, the social equilibrium is maintained. What appears as cause in one context seems to be effect in another; and that which is conditioned exercises an influence upon the conditioning force.

How as a result of these complicated interdependent

stresses and strains society is transformed, its bases rebuilt and the superstructure correspondingly modified is what we must consider next. It is the process of such transformations that constitutes the movement of history.

## XI

### *Why Revolution?*

#### I

LET us summarise and restate the issue plainly.

The manifold relations in society can all be said to fall broadly into two categories: "basis" and "superstructure". By "basis" we mean the economic system, those fundamental relations by which human beings maintain their existence. The "superstructure" denotes the activities and institutions which are administrative, and theoretical, psychological, spiritual in character. We argued, first, that this superstructure is determined by the basic economic system, and secondly, that the economic system is itself a function of the state of the productive forces.

But we have not yet asked how the productive forces themselves come into being, what they are conditioned by. This is easy to answer, for the productive forces are in their simplest or original and primary form things, material objects, tools. These cannot be produced, as it were, out of a man's head; they are a part of nature, appropriated from nature by man, the outcome of a necessity determined by conditions external to man. Hence the character of the productive forces is determined in the first instance by the peculiarities of the geographical environment. Stone

axes clearly could not have been produced by men in an environment where stone was lacking. If, later, stone axes become obsolete and more advanced productive forces come into being, the development does not take place spontaneously or automatically. It is urged on, controlled, by men—and men have always belonged to a specific social formation, to a specific economic system, *i.e.*, participated in a particular set of production relations. The development of the productive forces is thus a function of the economic system. Coal or electricity, etc., are all to be found in nature, but they are not appropriated and converted into productive forces until the economic structure, the production relations, have reached a certain degree of maturity.

We are therefore faced with a paradox: the production relations are conditioned by the productive forces, and the latter again are conditioned by the production relations. The paradox, however, is only apparent. We are dealing not with abstract, metaphysical entities, but concrete, historical relationships. Man has power over nature, and likewise, nature has power over man. Both statements are equally true. But we accord priority to nature because man, society, is a product of nature; we accord priority, again, to the productive forces because the inescapable condition of the existence of human societies is the maintenance of a relation with nature, a technological relation embodied in the productive forces. This does not, however, preclude us from recognising that society, having emerged from nature, subsequently modifies nature, that the economic system, created by the productive forces, subsequently shapes the movement of those very forces. This process of constant interaction between society and nature, between the economic

system and the productive forces must, moreover, be regarded as inherently contradictory. A moment's reflection will show why. A certain state of the productive forces requires a particular economic system; the economic system drives the productive forces forward: whereupon, a disequilibrium is created between the new stage that the productive forces have reached and the social formation within which they effected the advance. The two no longer accord with each other, there is a contradiction between them, a contradiction which calls for a modification of the production relations as the condition of its solution.

It is essential to remember that this process of interaction is not merely abstract, but takes place in and through human beings. The economic structure which changes and brings about changes is a living system or organisation of numerous interdependent parts—it is not a homogeneous, non-human, monolithic quantity. A disturbance of the relations between society and nature as expressed in the movement of the productive forces denotes a dislocation and requires a readjustment of this system of human relations—which cannot, evidently, occur without an alteration of human habits and anticipations, of minds and wills. It would be ridiculous to suggest that the material productive forces rise up and of their own power effect the reorganisation, these regroupings: they are effected by men themselves, in accordance with the exigencies of the material productive forces. The harmony or disharmony between economic structure and productive forces is thus reflected in a corresponding harmony or disharmony between the constituent elements of the economic structure; and where the principal constituent elements are classes,

distinguished from each other by their control over the means of production—in the harmony or disharmony between them. A class system, as production relations in general, is initially at all events in harmony with the prevailing productive forces. Hence, leaving aside the struggles involved in the very emergence of this system, we may say that in the early stages there is harmony, certainly no open conflict, between the classes belonging to the new order. In proportion, however, as the distance between economic structure and productive forces once more widens, the disparity of interest between the classes is accentuated.

But the growth of the productive forces is not an uninterrupted upward progression: nor is the sharpening clash between the classes without its final outcome. The productive forces are checked when the resiliency of the economic system is exhausted: that is to say, when they come up against a resistance built into the very fabric of class societies—the proprietary rights of a class over the means of production. Similarly, the class antagonism is brought to an end with the establishment of the ascendancy of the class which wields or embodies the developed productive forces. In the one case as in the other, the issue thus turns on property. For, in the last analysis, ownership gives men a reason for resisting change. It gives them power, privilege, and the opportunity of exploiting their fellow-men; more significantly, it schools them in the belief that the defence of the existing social and economic system is a question not only of self-preservation but of duty. Their ideals, values, religions, even their conceptions of what Mr Huxley calls the “meaning of life” are intimately bound up with it. In very truth, they stand or fall with the “thing” they own. The given property relations therefore serve as the extreme

limit beyond which gradual, evolutionary changes are impossible. They define the outlines of a society, distinguishing it from those which went before and those which are to come after. Within society, circumscribed in this manner, the productive forces develop and lead to alterations, of more or less importance, in the production relations; but when their continued development requires the overthrow of the *fundamental* production relations, *i.e.*, property relations, a decisive crisis is reached—one of the turning points in history. A long phase of “evolutionary” advance, of minor contradictions successfully overcome, thus culminates in a major contradiction between the productive forces and the production relations, the solution of which depends on the revolutionary disruption of the framework within which society had evolved up till then.

## 2

Property, however, is not simply an economic or social fact; or rather, because it is this, it is also a political fact. It is incorporated and enshrined in the central institution of all civilised peoples, the State. Metaphysicians, as is their habit, have seen in this institution too an embodiment of a supernatural principle constraining men to Be Good and Eschew Evil, but since we wish to refrain as far as possible from using words to which we cannot attach a precise meaning, we must be content with the evidence which associates the origin and functions of the State with the origin of private property and the interests of the possessing class. It is, in any case, undeniable that, throughout recorded history, the cleavage between those who owned and those who operated the means of production has roughly coincided with the cleavage



between the ruling and the subject class. This is not to say that we are in a position invariably to find a direct link between property and political power. The connection has often been circuitous or obscure. Like other phases of the superstructure, the State too, once it has come into existence, develops a limited degree of autonomy, and may thus come to be looked upon, particularly in those intermediate evolutionary phases to which we have already referred, as an authority set over society and above its contending classes.

Similarly, some of the functions of the State—the safeguarding of public health, for example—cannot always be said to derive immediately out of the needs of the ruling class; but whether or not they are discharged effectively depends on the energy and the resources that the dominant minority thinks fit to divert from its main preoccupation. And the main preoccupation we may describe briefly as the effort to develop the existing mode of production and to supply its essential prerequisites—education, for instance, or railway and postal services in modern industrial states and facilities for irrigation in the agricultural communities of the East. Up to a point, the welfare of the subject class is also bound up with the preservation of the prevailing economy; hence such measures as are indispensable to that preservation acquire an air of beneficence, even apart from the interests of the State. However, in class societies the economic system is at the same time a system of exploitation. There is always an actual or latent clash of interest between the classes, and of divergent interests within each class. To subjugate, crush or deflect these antagonisms, or to reconcile them, is thus a necessary part of the general purpose of maintaining social stability, and when all



other means, of bribery and deception, have been tried, violence remains the sole alternative. That is why we find the essence of the State, not as Mr Huxley suggests, in the conveniently misty regions of ethics and psychology, but in the perfectly plain and unmistakable power of coercion that it wields.

These considerations about the nature of the State—accepted, if not “theoretically”, at all events by implication and in practice by most contemporary historians and sociologists—must be recalled in order to complete our analysis of the dynamics of human evolution. Periodically, we said, the discrepancy between productive forces and the economic structure announces itself as a contradiction in the relations between men. In class societies, the contradiction takes the form of an irreconcilable antagonism between classes, and there is no way of rising above the antagonism or reconstructing society save by an act of destruction: the destruction of the property system which impedes the further development of the productive forces. We can now see why the whole process is also political in character. It is through the State, and its laws and organs, “sanctioned” ultimately by violence, that the dominant class exerts its authority and asserts its will. It is within the limits permitted by this truly “steel frame” that the productive forces evolve and the accompanying social and political modifications are effected. When, therefore, the point is reached where the productive forces cannot advance save by breaking up the economic system, and the interests of the two classes are found to be antithetical, the struggle between them inevitably takes the form of a political struggle, a struggle for power. The State, the organised violence of the State, is the chief instrument by which the ruling class protects the order to

which it is wedded and resists the new which threatens to annihilate it. Hence the seizure of the State and its transformation have ineluctably to precede the inception of a new evolutionary cycle. These are the human acts, the revolutions, by which in class society the contradiction between productive forces and production relations is solved; and the dates on which they are accomplished mark, with as much precision as we can ever hope to attain, the dividing line between one society, one historical epoch and another.

It follows that a revolution is not to be regarded, as Mr Huxley regards it, simply as a tussle between tyrants and would-be tyrants. On the contrary. Both in the process of its fruition and after, it penetrates and modifies every phase of social life. Subsidiary revolutions, minor crises and contradictions—in religion and philosophy, in art and science and the psychology of men—synchronise with and participate in what we are too prone to under-estimate as a “merely political” event. We have already seen that, although the different departments of the superstructure acquire a certain measure of autonomy, their development is controlled by their constant interaction with one another and with the foundations of society—that is to say, among other things, with the class character of society. Hence the defence of a given economic system and of the State built upon it involves at the same time a defence of the “ideologies” shaped by the dominant class during the period of its growth and ascendancy. The need for such defence only arises because the revolutionary class, in the course of *its* development, has brought into existence critical and dissident schools of thought which grow in influence and strength in proportion as that class becomes powerful in society—that is, in proportion as the basic social dis-

cord becomes aggravated. In view of the specific character of the superstructure, its involutions and counter-involutions, it is no doubt impossible to draw a straight and sharp line of demarcation corresponding to the situation of the classes at any given time. But the link between the two, between the movement of ideas and the movement of events—which is but the concrete historical expression of the development of class antagonisms—could hardly be missed if we were to follow them over a period of years, and particularly in such aspects of philosophy and science as are most directly concerned with the problems of society. The struggle to subvert the State is thus not only a political struggle, waged with the appropriate weapons, but a “theoretical” struggle to break down the ideological armature of the ruling class; and the Revolution which dissolves a class society that has outlived its usefulness marks also the birth of a new cultural epoch in the history of mankind.

## XII

### *Capitalist Imperialism*

#### I

In any society, the state of the productive forces is of cardinal importance, for it determines in the first instance the character of the economic system. The development of these two is conditioned by their interaction with each other. The process is interrupted by the emergence of a revolutionary phase in which an element integral to the economic system proves resistant to the productive forces. In class

societies, this phase is marked by the intensification of class antagonisms; and the obstructive property relations can only be eliminated by seizure of the political apparatus which is used by the owning class to defend itself and uphold the obsolete economic system.

Are these conclusions capable of throwing any light on the deepening chaos of the world to-day, and directing us in our search for the best course to pursue? An answer to the question requires, needless to say, that we should fix our attention on the prevailing economic system, consider its growth and its remaining potentialities; instead of adopting a number of arbitrary starting-points, as Mr Huxley does—education, the State, religion, war, “planning”, social reform, equality, etc., etc.—as though these were all independent categories, independent at any rate of the fundamental life processes of society.

It is a truism nowadays to say that, since capitalism arose out of the conditions of feudal society, there has been a gigantic growth of the productive forces. Science and technology have combined to subdue nature more effectively than in any past age. In so far as this development admits of precise computation, i.e., in terms of horse-power, the increase in the world total is estimated by experts to be over a thousand-fold. The consequence of such an enormous expansion of productive power is that the resources of nature upon which the material existence of man is built are to-day available in greater abundance than ever; and although the world's population, too, has in the meantime risen to an unprecedented figure, there is no longer any *technical* reason why the lives of the vast majority of men should be “nasty and brutish”, steeped in squalor and poverty, stultified and perverted to the extent that they are.

by Shelwenger, K.S.

These facts are not in dispute. It is equally indisputable that the production relations, and the corresponding forms of social and political organisation have also undergone numerous changes since the disruption of the feudal order by the nascent bourgeoisie. The class composition of society, the structure of the State and the dominant features of the economic system were all, of course, very different in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—to go no farther back—from what they are in the twentieth. It would be unnecessary, even if we had the space, to attempt to trace the successive stages of their evolution. But there is a transition of quite exceptional significance which we must consider for a moment—the transition, as we may say, from the old to the new capitalism.

The formula succinctly epitomises a double change the consequences of which were not only far-reaching, but closely inter-related. In the first place, as a result of the new technology and the competitive principle inherent in capitalism the organisation of industry on a small scale and in small units was superseded by large-scale production. Giant firms began to dominate the market in which formerly a multitude of individual producers had struggled to outbid each other for the consumer's favour. The very size of these new enterprises, however, involved the outlay of larger sums of capital than any single capitalist could supply. It involved, in other words, the concentration of funds drawn from many sources, and thus brought about an alliance between industry and finance in which the industrialist was usually the junior partner. The "small man" was not completely eliminated by the emergence of such monopolistic and semi-monopolistic concerns, but in all important spheres of economic life the reins of control thereby passed into the hands

of finance capital, "a power that is peculiarly mobile and flexible, peculiarly intertwined at home and internationally, peculiarly devoid of individuality and divorced from the immediate processes of production".

This is, however, but one aspect of a development which appears from the other side as an extension of the capitalist system over all the pre-capitalist areas of the world. The need for markets and raw materials which had animated the capitalism of an earlier period was only felt the more keenly when industry, in its modern "trustified" form, acquired the capacity to turn out goods in almost unlimited quantities. These requirements were now incorporated with and subordinated to an urgency that revealed itself little by little as the essential characteristic of this whole phase—the export of capital, of the super-profits that monopoly industry was able to earn in the domestic market, to countries where it commanded a higher rate of profit, where labour was cheap, and the natural resources yielded a richer harvest. Again, while the merchant corporations of the earlier period had been concerned in the main to obtain and defend exclusive rights of trade, the new capitalism was driven to establish varying degrees of political control—often amounting to outright conquest and annexation—and to bring about a more or less rapid transformation of the economic structure of the country concerned, in order both to safeguard the capital that was being poured in and to create and monopolise opportunities for further development. Colonial expansion on these lines thus came to be the counterpart of the movement which produced the monopoly of finance capital out of the free, competitive capitalism which had prevailed during the greater part of the nineteenth century. Since this movement occurred not in one

country alone, but in several—more or less simultaneously—and since competition was by no means abolished, but rather intensified between them, the drive for colonies proceeding from these different centres resulted, not without friction and conflict and war, in a division of all the occupied and unoccupied areas of the world between a handful of so-called Great Powers. Each of them either “owned” or exercised a predominant interest over large sections of the globe, which constituted their empires, and through their interaction they effected a greater degree of interdependence between the different parts of the world than was ever known.

We may say then—and there would surely be few to question the statement—that the development of capitalism has had two results of overriding significance. First, productive capacity has been heightened to a point which, in theory, makes it unnecessary for any of the earth’s inhabitants to be hard-pressed for the means of existence. Second, the different parts of the world have been drawn together so as to expose every country to the influence of changes occurring in every other. But the interdependence is qualified by the presence of empires each controlled by an oligarchy of finance capital (which is only a more precise description of the “ruling class” which, Mr Huxley concedes, is in possession of the State to-day). At the same time, the basic feature of the economic system, its capitalist character, has endured as the innermost principle of the evolutionary course that mankind has followed during the last three centuries.

Are we, however, justified in holding that capitalism is the innermost principle of this evolution, that the changes to which we have referred were brought about “as a result” of the development of capitalism? To



answer this question we must examine briefly what capitalism is and how it works. The distinguishing mark of capitalism as an economic system is that it places the means of production in the hands of a class which consents to utilise them—and thus to offer employment and a living to the other sections of society, including principally the working class—only to the extent that such use is calculated in the prevailing market conditions to yield a profit.

## 2

To understand how capitalism works, it would be best perhaps to start from the obvious truth that capitalists compete for profit. Success depends on their ability to sell more cheaply than their competitors—that is, to reduce their costs of production. They are impelled, therefore, constantly to improve and to perfect technical processes, to instal larger and more complex machinery, and in general to increase the productivity of labour. In the measure they thus advance the productive forces, their rivals are ruined, expropriated: “one capitalist always kills many”; capital is concentrated in fewer and more powerful hands, and capitalism acquires the corporate and monopolistic character to which we have already alluded. The effect and, indeed, the object of mechanisation is to render labour superfluous. “The demand for labour decreases to the extent to which capital makes the worker more productive and in proportion to such productivity.” As once millions of hand-workers were displaced by machinery, so the improvement and the extension of the use of machinery involve the displacement of large numbers of machine workers and, ultimately, the creation of an “industrial reserve army”—*i.e.*, a mass of available wage-workers



in excess of the average requirements of industry. To say that more and more people are excluded from production is, however, only another way of saying that a gradually diminishing number of workers are actually employed in the productive process. Since under capitalism, by definition, the incomes of all classes other than the owners consist of the wages and salaries (and charity) that they receive, there must naturally take place a simultaneous contraction of the amount distributed in this form, and hence of the consuming power of society. That is to say, the development of the productive forces and the restriction of the market which alone can absorb the commodities produced are inseparably connected with each other.

We may now state the position in more abstract terms. The aggregate capital of society—the resources of production used for production—tends to grow as capitalism develops, but that part of the total which is expended in the form of wages—variable capital—diminishes in proportion to constant capital, embodied in machinery, tools, plant, etc. Variable capital, however, not only pays wages, but creates new values; it alone breeds surplus value, or profit; and the rate of profit expresses the relation between the amount of profit and the total capital involved. The widening disproportion between variable and constant capital, the diminution of variable capital brought about by the development of the productive forces means, therefore, a decline in the rate of profit. This decline can be counteracted, or rather in spite of it the amount of profit can be increased, say doubled, by doubling the magnitude of variable capital. But if variable capital is to be doubled, constant capital must be more than doubled, for, with the growth of technology

an ever greater amount of constant capital is required as compared with variable. To beat off the falling rate of profit and to increase the amount of profit, capitalists are therefore compelled unceasingly to accumulate more and more capital. Yet the ultimate effect of such accumulation is only to sharpen the disparity between productive power and consuming power that we have noticed above. For accumulation only signifies the heaping up of the means of production, a rise in the productivity of labour through the application of larger and improved machinery. The composition of capital is altered: there is a decrease in the proportion of variable to constant capital; hence also a decrease in the consuming power of society relative to productive power at its new and enhanced level. The disparity between the two cannot be bridged by "high" wages and an arbitrary distribution of purchasing power for the simple reason that the funds for this purpose can only be drawn from the profits which are needed for accumulation, the essential process by which the amount of profit is maintained and increased.<sup>1</sup>

Capitalism, then, is a system which must continually expand as the condition of its survival; it *must*—regardless of the whims of any individual capitalist—seek to pile up capital, increase productive capacity and widen the market. These compulsions, however, inevitably conflict with the hard fact that the very measures which enable the capitalists to produce at a profit, the limitation of the consuming power of the masses, prevents them from selling the commodities produced. At each successive stage in the growth of capitalism, the disharmony between the

<sup>1</sup> We have unavoidably to omit an account of the theory of value on which the above analysis rests.

available forces of production and the "effective demand" of the masses—demand backed by purchasing power—is repeated and accentuated.

## 3

Since capitalism must expand—and the need for expansion becomes the more acute when capitalism reaches the highly organised stage of monopoly that has been described as finance capital—it must, after a certain point, look outwards for the markets without which it cannot exist, the "colonies" which by very reason of their being undeveloped are still able to absorb its otherwise unsellable consumers' goods and its otherwise unusable capital. It was as a result of this quest for markets, inevitable in the circumstances of capitalist production, that the world first came to be divided into a number of great empires. Notwithstanding the advantage of overwhelming strength that lay on the side of imperialism, this process was not carried through without abominable cruelty and the imposition of grave hardships on the subjugated peoples; and among its results was the "naturalisation" of the capitalist mode of production in the backward country. Once the partition of the world has been completed, capitalist societies do not of course cease to develop. But they develop unevenly, at varying tempos in varying countries. When in any particular country the development reaches the stage of monopolistic organisation, the need for foreign markets becomes imperative, but no foreign market can be broken into without disturbing the equilibrium represented by the existing division of the world. The acquisition of new markets and the defence of markets already "owned" or controlled thus form the core of the antagonism between rival monopolistic groups,

the core of world politics. Their conflicting claims are enforced by legislative, economic and diplomatic means; they are adjusted and regulated by conferences and international agreements; but, inevitably, when all these measures fail and the necessity for expansion becomes irresistible, the capitalism of the country concerned must either resign itself to collapse and suffocation or seek to assert its demand by military force. There is no third course open; and war, when war is decided upon, is but a continuance of the policy of expansion which monopoly capital had formerly pursued by other, "peaceful", methods. The opportunity for such expansion has, however, been severely curtailed, since 1917, mainly by the withdrawal of the vast territories of what used to be the Tzarist Empire from the range of capitalist exploitation, while at the same time the number of fully developed capitalist societies has increased. In a world that offers relatively less scope for imperialist expansion, the urgency to expand is shared by more imperialisms than ever. Clearly, there is no device compatible with capitalism by which that urgency can be satisfied save war, as the spectacle of the world around us abundantly testifies.

Inescapably, therefore, capitalism, if left alone, must plunge us into the horrors of war. Meanwhile, it surrounds us with the scarcely less fearful "horrors of peace"—with poverty and hunger and destitution, and the threat of insecurity which confronts all but the most fortunate amongst us. Such are, no doubt, the invariable accompaniments of capitalist crises; but so long as capitalism as a whole was expanding—that is, so long as the growth of one capitalist group did not involve the crippling of another capitalist group—they served as a prelude to the resumption of

production at a higher level, and hence also to an increase in wages and employment. But in the circumstances of to-day, when every capitalist society is desperate and hard pressed, crises are only mitigated by the development of the armaments industry to monstrous proportions, and they can be "resolved", if at all, only by the ultimate holocaust of war. For, it must be patent to everyone, capitalism is no longer capable of organising the gigantic productive forces that it has brought into being, a failure of which the most glaring expression is the chronic unemployment of scores of millions of workers throughout the capitalist world. Far from expanding production, modern monopolies find it impossible, because unprofitable, to use more than a fraction of the available resources of production; while the "economic reconstruction" demanded by publicists of Mr Huxley's type, and carried out most thoroughly in Germany and Italy, leads not so much to increased production and employment, but to a restriction of output and the State guarantee of profits at the expense of the "small man", the worker or the consumer.

We are now in a position to understand why there is in our time "a regression in charity, especially in politics", which Mr Huxley notes with his characteristic "detachment", but without offering an explanation. Politics is the sphere in which the social antagonisms intensified by the manifest breakdown of the economic system acquire decisive significance. The opposition between the interests of the classes is latent in every class society, but it is smoothed over as often as it expresses itself so long as the society continues to develop. When, however, that development is checked, as is the case to-day, by the incompatibility of the productive forces with the property

relations underlying the economic system, and a general decline sets in, the consequences bear most heavily upon the working class. Their interests are then irreconcilably opposed to those of the owners—for the only measure which can alleviate their condition is the destruction of the property system which binds and fetters the productive forces. In proportion as the working class becomes conscious of this, in proportion as it becomes revolutionary, it must present a challenge to the State machine by means of which finance capital protects its monopoly. That such is in fact the purpose which the State largely serves to-day, no one who has followed the history of recent years can well doubt. Even in the democratic countries—where the State is supposed to be “above classes”—more and more dictatorial powers have been assumed by the Government, not merely to facilitate the preparation and waging of war, but to combat the rising militancy of the workers. This tendency has only been brutally extended by fascism, the major achievement of which has been to break up the workers’ organisations and to beat down the workers’ standard of life, and the major preoccupation of which is to discipline the workers into passive instruments of imperialism, ready to work or to kill—for the greater glory of capital.

Hunger, war and fascism—these are the triple fruits of imperialism. They are the interdependent expression of the truth that capitalism is “played out”, that it has deprived itself, by its very growth, of the capacity to effect any social advance. It “has become disloyal to its mission”, which is “the ruthless development in geometrical progression, of the productivity of human labour”. Within its decaying structure, there can be nothing but recurrent instability, recur-

rent war and a steady relapse into the barbarism tempered with balderdash that the fascists preach and practise. On the other hand, the only basis of a "better society" that is not utterly utopian is provided by the "socialisation" of the productive process which has been carried to such an extent under capitalism that no man can say that a commodity is entirely of his own making. It is this "socialisation" which affords the opportunity for the development of the classless and hence also the Stateless society. Before that can happen, however, capitalist private property, already resting on "socialised" production, must be transformed into socialised property, and the working class which alone can engineer the Revolution must, as in the Russia of 1917, seize the State apparatus which is being used to prevent the accomplishment of this change. From being a weapon of finance capital, the State must become a weapon of the common man.

### XIII

#### *The Meaning of Life*

##### I

BEFORE proceeding further, we must attempt to deal with a somewhat portentous question that Mr Huxley has raised and the importance of which he rates very highly indeed—the question as to the meaning of life. What are the beliefs we are entitled to hold about "nature" and the "world" in general?

As for Mr Huxley himself, he is an "idealist", in the philosophical sense of the term. He holds with



Hegel—notwithstanding his bitter animadversions against that great thinker—that there is an impersonal and all-embracing spiritual reality, God. Matter, nature, and the world as a whole are inferior to God; they have been created by Him; and in man there is a divine or spiritual principle, essentially different from matter. Moreover, like other philosophers who have held similar views, Mr Huxley tends to exalt spiritual contemplation above manual labour and to suggest that it is the function of the “intellectuals” to propound the theories which are to be put into practice by “others”.

This affirmation of the primacy of spirit rests, in Mr Huxley's case, mainly on the argument that the mystical experience proves it. The great mystics are unanimous in their testimony that they have experienced union with God—so there is God. Such reasoning might be convincing if we had any knowledge of a mystic who did not start with a prior belief in God—however thickly veiled it may be, as among the Hindus and Buddhists, with metaphysical jargon—and who did not voluntarily and systematically induce the appropriate psychological state within himself. As it is, the argument merely amounts to saying that if you believe in God and submit yourself to a certain training with a view to obtaining confirmation of that belief, there is a chance of your obtaining such confirmation through a particular kind of psychic experience. If, in other words, you go on cultivating the belief for a sufficiently long time that you are God, one day you may suddenly feel that you *are* God. This is suspiciously like the psychological prescription recommended by Monsieur Coué. What is more, the assertion that spirit or mind is prior to everything is repudiated by all that is known about



the development of the world. Before the mind of man appeared, there was, as we have noted, the embryonic mind of animals and the diverse forms of life; and before ever there was living matter, there was inanimate matter. These are established facts, a part of the general stock of scientific knowledge to-day. To suggest, in defiance of them, that spirit created the world or mind matter, is as repugnant to common-sense as the suggestion that "the child gives birth to the parent, or that the circulation of the blood is a consequence of Harvey's theory".

We must therefore start from the proposition that nature and matter are primary and spirit and mind come after. But what are we to understand by "matter"? In its simplest sense, of course, matter is synonymous with the physical objects that we are able to touch and handle, but this definition does not cover such forms of matter as for example light or electricity. To find a more adequate answer, we must consider how matter behaves. What is its distinctive characteristic? Modern experimental physics fully bears out the fact that all forms of matter—however tenuous, however intangible they may be—are in a state of perpetual motion. "Movement is the mode of existence of matter." The universe is not a structure, but a flux. "When we reflect on nature, on the history of mankind, or our own intellectual activity, the first picture presented to us is of an endless maze of relations and interactions in which nothing remains what, where, and as it was, but everything moves, changes, comes into being and passes out of existence. . . . Everything is and is not, for everything is in flux, is constantly changing, constantly coming into being and passing away."<sup>1</sup> While, then, matter is

<sup>1</sup> Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, p. 27.

in a general sense the movement of all that exists,<sup>1</sup> it is possible to attach a more specific meaning to the expression, a meaning implicit in the assertion that nature is anterior to mind. Matter, looked at from this angle, may be defined as a relation, the prior condition of a given phenomenon. In the social sciences, for instance, "matter" is the whole framework of life, everything that precedes and circumscribes human conduct. In the case of an individual, a basis of this kind is set by his physical constitution, and his habits. These, in turn, are conditioned by his work and his place in society, which are themselves governed by the character of the prevailing economic system.<sup>2</sup>

If the universal characteristic of matter is movement, and in the course of this movement successive forms of matter emerge, what is the process by which the novelty comes into being? How does the movement of matter result in evolution, in the appearance of new, different and higher forms? We must notice now that "the movement of matter" is a phrase which conceals an equivocation. For a movement is movement only in relation to contradictory movements. When we speak of matter in motion, we mean accordingly that different and contradictory movements are at work in matter. It is in consequence of the clash of such opposed forces that evolution is driven forward. The process is dialectical, not simple and rectilinear. Each new form of matter is thus the product of the interaction of contradictory elements present in the old. The crisis, or revolution, by means

<sup>1</sup> "Mechanical movement by no means exhausts movement in general. Movement is not by any means just a 'movement', a simple change of place; it is in hyper-mechanical realms a change of quality too." Engels, *Anti-Duhring*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *A la lumière du marxisme*, Vol. II, p. 46.

of which the transition is finally effected is not merely destructive; it brings about a new synthesis which includes yet transcends the former contradiction. Thus physics is not mechanics, biology is not physics, animal life is not vegetable life and human societies are more than biological aggregates. These new levels of reality come into existence only on the basis of the antecedent level of reality, but each of them embodies a distinctive feature and develops according to its own specific laws. They cannot therefore be explained entirely in terms of the antecedent reality; the higher and the more complex cannot be reduced to the lower and the less complex. Thought, for instance, is only made possible by a particular organisation of the brain, but it is not identical with physico-chemical reactions, nor are its laws their laws. In other words, the "thesis" and the "anti-thesis" out of the conflict of which the synthesis is engendered are not to be regarded as causal factors, if we mean thereby that generative capacity resides wholly in the cause, and the effect has no independent qualities whatever. Causality is not unilateral; it does not, as nineteenth-century materialists believed, and as Mr Huxley is inclined to think, operate only in one direction. The effect, once it has been produced, is as much an independent agent as the cause which brought it into being. There is a constant process of interchange, of action and reaction between the two, which can best be described as the interaction between a reality and its circumambient conditions. Life is not merely the effect of physico-chemical laws; mind is not merely the effect of the organism; society is not merely the effect of the economic system; but life has physico-chemical *conditions*, mind has organic *conditions*, and society economic *conditions*. Between the conditions

and the reality which appears in their midst, there is a reciprocal action in the course of which the former are subject to modification by the latter.

The world, then, on this view, is not so much a medley of separate and fixed objects or ideas, but a complex of interdependent processes where the impulses for development are "imparted by the contradiction, the conflict of different forces and tendencies reacting on a given body, or inside a given phenomenon or within a given society". Every fact, every tendency, every idea acts upon and reshapes the conditions which gave birth to it. While modifying their character, it cannot however do away with them, for its own existence is bound up with *their* existence. These conditions are, accordingly, *limiting* conditions; they restrict and define the scope and potentialities of the phenomenon, the reality which arises out of them and whose transforming influence they cannot themselves escape. Thus, to take our examples from society: geographical conditions limit the possibilities of the economic system: economic conditions limit the possibilities of psychological development, and these in turn limit intellectual, spiritual and ideological possibilities. But within these limits, there is set up an infinitely complicated system of interactions affording room for the effective operation of all the diverse factors involved.

Let us consider for a moment the fallacies in which we shall entangle ourselves if we decline to see the process of development as dialectical. We shall be compelled forthwith to adopt the mechanistic view, and to hold that a change represents nothing more than the effect of a prior cause and embodies no qualitative novelty. Good, we shall say, is the necessary effect of a prior good; evil breeds evil. Develop-

ment, in other words, is simply increase or diminution, a repetition of that which already exists, and everything existed in a primordial cause, a *causa causans*, out of which they have been gradually extruded. Whatever we single out for study can, therefore, be understood wholly by reference to that which preceded it. So to Mr Huxley (as to Sir A. Keith and the author of *Biopolitics*, which we are assured is comparable in importance to *The Wealth of Nations*)<sup>1</sup> there are no significant differences between the animal kingdom and human societies: "evolution [biological evolution] has resulted in the world as it is to-day". Is it not clear that such propositions, while they seem to explain development, actually deny that there is anything to be explained? If, on the other hand, we reject the mechanistic view as well as the dialectical and yet recognise—as who can fail to recognise?—the existence of different objects and phenomena, we shall be left without any means of understanding how they come into being or pass away; and we shall be obliged, with Mr Huxley, to suppose that evil, which appears so mysteriously, will vanish by the steady accretion of good, and that the State, far from being dependent on a particular organisation of society, could be made to disappear painlessly by peopling the world with a sufficient number of godly and virtuous men. Ultimately, indeed, this manner of looking at the world as a collection of inert categories reduces itself to the antithesis between mind and matter. The problem then arises of explaining the origin of either of them out of the other, and their present interaction. How can they affect each other if they are totally different, as a suet pudding is from a Shakespearean sonnet? And how can we derive one

<sup>1</sup> See the *Observer*, Jan. 16, 1938.

from the other? Only by dogmatically fusing them—as Mr Huxley does—into a “conglomerate” and presenting this fiction as yet another autonomous category.<sup>1</sup>

The hypothesis that mind is the outcome of a long temporal process: that matter, on reaching a certain degree of organisation, is *thinking* matter: that change and movement involve the opposition of contradictory elements within the given unity: that the resultant phenomenon contains not only vestiges of the old but a novel and distinctive quality, and is therefore entitled to be described as “higher”, more advanced and complex: that, having come into existence, it reacts upon its basis and every surrounding facet of reality; this hypothesis not only avoids the respective errors of idealism and materialism, but has the merit of according with the facts of experience and of experimental science. It is—since we must have labels—known as dialectical materialism. The “ultimate reality”, on this view, is the “universal, total and *living* interdependence” and movement of every element or “isolate” in an endless process of development, the most general pattern that we can deduce from this inextricable complexity being given in the sequence of phenomena, the order of their appearance: first the nebula, then the sun; first matter, then mind; first the animal, then man. There could have been no economic system but for the preceding system of nature; and there is no ideological, spiritual

<sup>1</sup> It is curious that Mr Huxley who quotes M. Meyerson to support the view that “explanation” means the reduction of diversity to unity should have overlooked the fact that it is precisely M. Meyerson who, in recent times, has demonstrated more amply than any other philosopher the inadequacy of the older, non-dialectical, Aristotelian logic. See *De l'explication dans les sciences*, Paris, 1927.

system, activity or aspiration which is not preceded, hence limited, by social economy. The development, moreover, is not a process of mechanical aggregation or the reaction to an external compulsion; it is rooted in the contradiction present in every "isolate", contradiction which is "not simply the negation of normality but is the principle of self-movement".<sup>1</sup> And this inherently contradictory development proceeds, in Lenin's words, not in a straight line but "in spirals", repeating the stages already passed, but repeating them in a different way and on a higher level.

## 2

Several consequences flow from the kind of analysis that we have been attempting to present, and none of them is perhaps very soothing to our complacency. One is that the "meaning of life" is indecipherable. Mr Huxley, in his sublime detachment and with the clarity of vision that it confers upon him, suggests very charitably that the people who deny that "life" has a "meaning", or do not pause to look for it, are mostly immature youths consumed by the lusts of the flesh. Might it not be that "life" has "meaning" only on the assumption that the world is a dead and lifeless thing and that we pass out of it into "eternal life", carrying our souls, our precious "fragments of spirit", with us? If the universe is a moving, evolving actuality, how can we pretend to discern in advance the contours into which it will be moulded? And

<sup>1</sup> "Identity is the definition only of a simple, immediate, dead being, but contradiction is the root of all movement and vitality, and only in so far as a thing has in itself contradiction does it move, does it possess an impulse and activity . . . All things are contradictory in themselves—this proposition expresses the truth and essence of things better than any other." Hegel. Quoted in *A Textbook of Marxist Philosophy*, p. 140.



would any conception of the "meaning of life" be worthy of that description unless it embodied a view of the past and the future, unto their utmost reaches, as well as of the present? True, we can within limits foresee the shape of things to come—to-morrow, the day after, in the next generation, by examining contemporary reality and the direction of the movements to-day. But the next century, and the next, and the millennia to follow? Will they merely repeat the yesterdays? Will they not rather contain elements of qualitative uniqueness? If they will—and we must assert that they will, on the basis of our knowledge of the past and present—is there any sense in asking for the "meaning of life"?

The phrase would be comprehensible if reason were a divine principle—gifted with the power that we must presume God to have of surveying all creation from the day he "breathed upon the waters" till the crack of doom. Reason in that case would itself be God, the Creator, the metaphysical, mathematical God who presides over nature and ordains its course. Unfortunately, however, we cannot wish away the fact that reason is a product of natural evolution. If we *do* wish it away, and hold that reason is an eternal category, superior to the realities of society and nature, could it be of the smallest use to us in our effort to understand, explain, change ourselves and that external reality which are both so intrinsically alien to it? For reason, on this view, is a faculty which defines and classifies objects and phenomena according to the rules of formal logic with their principle of the exclusion of contradictions. It presupposes a rigid and changeless reality. But the reality we have to deal with is an unstable and mobile complex of which the first characteristic is fluidity. Hence there arises the



temptation to throw up our hands and declare with resignation that reality is irrational. A highly gratifying result, this, for it leaves us free to maintain that science and reason cannot penetrate to the essence of things, and that the "ultimate reality" must be sought along other paths—the paths of faith and mysticism, of feelings and glandular satisfactions. To attain to the knowledge of God we must—as Mr Huxley and the neo-Yogis would say—stimulate our *chakras*. Faced with the endlessly rich complexity of the real, and unwilling to cast off the crippling notion of reason as a spiritual category, we are driven to the absurdity of equating our visceral harmonies, our physiological and psychological states, our experiences—mystical, erotic, anal and æsthetic—with the "music of the spheres", with divine verity.

It happens to be the case, however, that reason is not a heavenly but an earthly and "material" product. It is a synthesis, a particularly significant synthesis, which arises in the course of development. Consequently, it cannot be exempt from the quality which pervades the whole process of that development—the quality of movement, of division into opposites, of contradiction. The existence of this quality does not therefore preclude us from affirming the rationality of the process that it characterises. The affirmation would be illegitimate on the hypothesis that reason is a supernatural principle, but on that hypothesis reason is condemned to revolve in its own celestial and autonomous sphere—to stew in its own juice—and be incapacitated from contact with the irrational actuality. When, however, reason is considered as a natural category, it is emancipated from the restrictions of the Aristotelian logic: its processes and movements are recognised to be what they are—

dialectical. To assert that the real is rational—a proposition which arouses Mr Huxley's ire—is therefore to assert that it is rational in *this* sense, *i.e.*, *dialectically* rational. It is to assert—what indeed must be obvious—that reality is not homogeneous and identical with itself, but shot through with an infinitude of contradictions of which in terms of our moral evaluations, the contradiction between good and bad is but one.

These considerations debar us from the comfortable scepticism which is linked with the quest for the “meaning of life”, for a reality other than the cosmic, natural and social reality of which we incontestably form a part. *This* reality is rational, and pervious to reason. We must, however, hasten to forestall a possible misapprehension. The view that concedes to reason, or rather sees in it the power of penetrating reality, has nothing in common with the rationalism indulged in by Mr Huxley on the strength of the tradition of an earlier age. Its quality is indicated by Mr Huxley's readiness to refer to himself, indifferently, as a rational or a speculative idealist. The implication is that reason, by turning in on itself, and refining its categories and re-ordering them on the basis of the static logic of the ancient and mediæval world, is capable of acquiring true knowledge. But speculative philosophy of this type can throw little more light on reality than the rantings of hot gossellers, whether religious or political. If reason can lead to knowledge, it can only do so, obviously, on condition that it turns outward and casts its gaze on that which is to be known. Not abstract ratiocination but a sober and scrupulous inquiry into the nature of the object is therefore the appropriate method. The proposition is elementary, but some

important corollaries must be deduced from it. Since priority and primacy in the process of knowledge are accorded to external fact, and external fact is infinite in its diversity and ceaseless in its motion, we can never hope for any knowledge that could aspire to the solemn dignity of Eternal Truth. Each fact, each group of facts, unavoidably but artificially isolated from a larger whole, must be studied in its interconnections and in the movement to which it is impelled by its inherent contradictoriness. What it will *be* can only be known by what it has been, and is; its future is a function of its present. As facts change, knowledge too changes. Knowledge is always *post factum*; it can be anterior to fact, foresee and predict only in the measure in which that fact has been understood in its actual state: *i.e.*, in the measure in which its inner laws have been comprehended. There can, in short, be no total explication of reality, since reality itself is not *total*, *i.e.*, finished, complete and at rest.

If, nevertheless, we *want* a total explication, we must either deny that the real can change or that the changeable can be real. Or rather, since few of us would care brazenly to deny the latter proposition, we must argue, with Mr Huxley, that the reality of the changeable is only apparent—thus incidentally authorising ourselves to pour scorn on the idea of history, society and nature; and assert at the same time that beneath or above—blessed prepositions!—the apparent reality, there exists an immobile and perfect super-reality, the knowledge of which is true knowledge or wisdom. The problem that is concealed in such dualism—the problem of reconciling the impermanence of an apparent reality with the permanence of a super-reality—is insoluble, unless

we are prepared to introduce mystery, miracle, dogma and the "irreducible irrationality" of things to help us out. The procedure is not without its advantages. Any prophet or politician can use it and announce himself as the mouthpiece of the ultimate mystery, God; and any charlatan can put forward the claim that his shoddy fabrications represent the last word in wisdom. What is more, on these premises, there is no way of demonstrating that they are wrong. That is why philosophies which exalt mysticism, sound the recall to religion and adjure us to meditate on the immutable reality are becoming increasingly fashionable in this age of dictatorships. On the other hand, the only philosopher who had the courage to accept the mutability of the real and the massive intellect necessary to attempt a total explication—Hegel—was obliged to conclude, rather lamely, that the evolution of the universe ceased with the elaboration of his system.

A total explication, a perfect and comprehensive system labelled Truth is, therefore, unattainable except on the preposterous assumption of the finality and fixity of the universe. The real is partial and incomplete, so *at best* our knowledge must be partial and incomplete. But whence can we derive the assurance that our knowledge is knowledge and not error? Only by applying that knowledge to reality, *i.e.*, by verifying it in practice. This must surely be obvious. If we concede that knowledge is not obtained by reason plunging within itself: that knowledge which is not knowledge of reality is not knowledge at all: that, accordingly, knowledge is an image or reflection of reality, then its truth must depend, manifestly, on the fidelity of the reflection, on the "likeness" of the image—and in what other way can we ascertain this

save by action? How else can we establish the conformity of knowledge to reality—which is its truth—save by putting it into practice? We must, however, be careful not to confound this view with another upheld by Mr Huxley and the pragmatists: that “the tree is known by its fruit”, that a belief is to be judged true if its practical consequences are satisfactory. Its criterion, they say, should be sought in its agreement not with the fact it purports to represent, but with our hopes and desires. If I believe in Heaven and Hell, and the belief makes me happy and “feel” good, the belief is true. If the practice of mysticism fills me with exaltation, then mysticism is true—there is a spiritual super-reality. If I “disbelieve” in the State, and the disbelief accords with my interests and aspirations, it is a true disbelief—the State does not exist. If I utter a lie to suit my convenience and get away with it, if I set up an engine of propaganda and sweep the land with falsehood, these lies and falsehoods are true so long as they “work”, so long as they achieve the desired end. What is considered to be a “fact” is only a “point of view”, and truth is nothing more than a belief that is valuable to the believer. “You are right,” as Pirandello’s hero says, “if you think you are.”

Does not our position involve the same sinister implications? No; because it is only by denying that the world is knowable—a denial that might seem inexplicable to people who are not born philosophers and mystics—that the pragmatists are able to maintain that truth is merely what one likes to imagine it to be. Reality, according to them, is profoundly irrational; there is nevertheless an occasional congruence between its vagaries and our wishes; and whether or not the congruence exists in any particular

case can only be found by asserting our will and seeing what happens. Practice is therefore simply the execution of a belief, the enforcement of a desire; and since we have no access to knowledge of the world, the very notion of true knowledge must be discarded. Is it surprising that fascist demagogues and fascist publicists find these doctrines useful and congenial? On the other hand, when we hold that we *can* know the world, what we submit to the test of action is not any spontaneous improvisation that happens to fit in with our purposes, but a hypothesis suggested by knowledge gained in previous encounters with reality. "Verifying an hypothesis by the test of facts is a very different process from choosing an hypothesis because we like it. An hypothesis is verified by finding out what facts would follow from it, and then looking to the facts to see whether they are as the hypothesis demands. The unfavourable answer is taken as well as the favourable and the hypothesis modified accordingly." A given state of knowledge is accordingly not unconnected with preceding states, not an arbitrary construction invented *ad hoc* and subsequently imposed upon facts—to the pragmatist the truth of yesterday has no relevance to the truth of to-day unless we choose to think that it has—but itself the result of prior activity. Hence the contention that practice is the criterion of truth means—as it does *not* mean in pragmatic philosophy—not only that the correctness of our knowledge is *tested out* in this manner, but that knowledge, whether correct or incorrect, is *acquired* in this manner, *i.e.*, by the practical handling of reality. The proof that we *do* possess knowledge of fact, of the actual universe, consists in our ability to modify fact and change the universe; and imperfect and conditional as our know-

ledge at any stage may be, it is none the less knowledge—a reflection of, an approximation to reality.

How do these unavoidably abstract arguments bear on the question of the “meaning of life”? We may be allowed to claim, perhaps, that they establish, first, that reality is “material”, evolutionary and incomplete, not perfect, static and “spiritual”. Secondly, man and the mind of man are products of this reality. Thirdly, there is a contact, an interconnection between mind and the reality of which it forms a part. Fourthly, knowledge—which constitutes the interconnection—is achieved through action. Fifthly, as reality evolves, new aspects of it are brought within the range of human action, *i.e.*, of human knowledge. Knowledge and the mind of man, too, are accordingly not fixed quantities, but develop with the development of the real. We must add, at this point, that the action in which knowledge is conceived and by which knowledge grows is, because it is human action, social action; and the knowledge which modifies and extends practice is similarly social practice. In view of these considerations, what can the “meaning of life” mean? Can it mean anything more than the totality at any given time of the knowledge which is shared by all the individuals in society and the practice that is inseparable from that knowledge? If we are not to treat the phrase as an entirely unintelligible juxtaposition of words, we must conclude therefore that the meaning of life cannot be discerned, attained or expressed—one is at a loss for the right verb—by any single person, however acute and many-sided his genius. The feat which numerous philosophers, mystics and metaphysicians claim to have performed can only be compassed by the human race as a whole. But there is something which *does* lie within



our individual competence—to help by appropriate action to amplify the meaning that life *can* have, to change and transform the reality to which we belong.

## XIV

### *Ends Are Means*

#### I

THE outlook that we have tried to present in these pages rests on the recognition, first, that there is no reason, no evidence of any kind, to support the belief that a supernatural principle ever insinuated itself into a corporeal frame; second, that God, whether personal or impersonal, is not the creator but the creation of man in the course of his evolution; and third, that the only reality of which we can claim knowledge is the changing reality of which the individual, the society to which he belongs and the natural environment which surrounds them both are the interdependent parts. The doctrine which passes for “humanism” in current controversy—echoes of which haunt Mr Huxley’s philosophy—depends, on the contrary, for its validity on the belief, first, that there is in all men, because they are men, an eternal and uniform something, a soul; second, that, corresponding to it, there is in the universe at large an eternal and unchanging something, God; and third, that the ultimate destiny of human beings is to bring these ineffable entities into mutual contact—to merge them, as Mr Huxley would say, in the mystical union. The quarrel between philosophers of this persuasion and those who openly acknowledge their adherence to some



form of religion is a family quarrel. The latter insist—Mr T. S. Eliot, for example, *contra* Babbitt—that God is personal, that he has established a church to lead souls unto him and that priests and prophets have been ordained to serve as intermediaries; while the “humanists” contend that the individual can attain “goodness” and fulfil his end without these adventitious and at times harmful aids. In the last chapter, as well as in the one on the “Philosophical Basis of Pacifism” as expounded by Mr Huxley, we have had to point out the difficulties involved in these assertions, and there is no need to discuss them at greater length.

It follows from our argument that we are what we are—any of us individually and any generation of us—because society and nature have made us so; and society more perhaps than nature, since our undifferentiated energies, physical and biological, are shaped by and can only find expression in a particular social environment. “Art,” Burke said in a moment of penetrating insight, “is man’s nature.” And indeed, if we mean by “art” the institutions and customs, the traditions and technologies, the ethical and intellectual disciplines which constitute the “social heritage”, the *milieu* in which we are born, it is undeniable that art enters into every pore of our existence and colours every aspect of our nature. Even sensations and sensibilities, innate as we take them to be, are in this sense artificial products of society;<sup>1</sup> while the

<sup>1</sup> “Any empirical subject always goes beyond the bounds of ‘pure’ sensual ‘raw material’; his experience, representing the result of the influence of the external world on the knowing subject in the process of his practice, stands on the shoulders of the experience of other people. In his ‘I’ there is always contained a ‘we’. In the pores of his sensations there already sit the products of transmitted knowledge (the external expressions

categories of our thought, the material upon which our hands and brains work, whether we are "speculative rationalists" or illiterate peasants, the assumptions and hopes which guide our conduct are yet more clearly and indubitably the result of complex historical processes anterior to and hence independent of us. If we persist in holding that we are of celestial or divine origin, we gratuitously place ourselves under the necessity of accepting clumsy metaphysical and theological excuses to account for our presence in a wicked and turbulent world.

Society, however, is not an inscrutable and autonomous force impinging on us and twisting us to its own ends. *We*, in all our inter-relations, are society. While our needs and capacities are in the first instance "given" by society, the needs change and multiply as they are fulfilled; and the capacities develop as they are exercised; and the changing needs and the developed capacities result in transforming the social structure out of which they arose and enriching the social heritage which made them possible. In short, if society makes man, man in turn re-makes society—whether or not it be his conscious aim. In so far as it is his conscious aim, he can only succeed to the extent in which he understands the specific problems of the society with which he is concerned and the specific obstacles that it presents to the realisation of his desires.

This may seem obvious but it is only too often ignored—by Mr Huxley, for example. Rendered uneasy

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of this are speech, language and conceptions adequate to words). In his individual experience there are included beforehand, external nature and history—i.e., social history. Consequently epistemological Robinson Crusoes are just as much out of place as Robinson Crusoes were in the 'atomistic' social science of the eighteenth century." *Science at the Cross Roads*, p. 12. Cf *A la lumière du marxisme*.

and apprehensive by the crisis in which the world is floundering, he has jumped to the conclusion that our task is to set up an "ideally perfect and just society" composed of "ideally perfect and non-attached individuals." In *Brave New World* he described a society which turned out morons automatically: now he conjures up the vision of a society which would turn out mystics with similar facility. The procedure doubtless has its compensations, but it does not make for clarity. The ideal society, Mr Huxley believes, would be a progressive one—but towards what can absolute perfection and justice progress? The ideal society, moreover, is to offer increased opportunities for the disinterested search for truth—but could there be any truths not already mastered by men and women who have literally become one with the final and everlasting verity? It is evident that Mr Huxley has merely projected into a remote and nebulous future isolated aspects of society, past and present, that happen to have commended themselves to him. The result is more than muddle, it is futility. For so engrossed is he in preparing the blue prints of Utopia that he completely forgets to tell us the ways and means by which actual evils and injustices can be overcome. If our efforts, unlike his, are to be fruitful and well-directed, we must fix our attention on the relations between men and institutions as they actually obtain in our time, and consider how they can be re-arranged so as to provide the pattern of a better society.

Essentially, the relation between freedom of the will and necessity is an aspect of the relation between man and society. Free-will is not an inalienable metaphysical attribute of an unalterable self. It is a historical and social category, even as man is. It emerges, as we have seen, in the course of the development of the

capacity of human beings in society to act upon reality, natural and human. It is amplified in proportion as that social capacity develops, and to the same extent the limits and character of the necessity which controls it are also changed. We are so much under the influence of older modes of thought that we ignore this reciprocal relationship and tend to assume that freedom and necessity exclude each other. The assumption leads to endless confusion, for freedom is not a mysterious gift functioning in a vacuum: it has its setting, its field, which is necessity. To recognise the interdependence of the two, to see in freedom a power that is shaped by and helps to shape the *milieu* in which it operates, is not to diminish its significance. It is, rather, to become aware of the conditions in which it can be exercised most effectively. Every artist would vouch for the truth that when we grasp the limitations of our medium, we apprehend its potentialities as well, and are thus enabled to mould the reality with which we are dealing more in accordance with our heart's desire. To overlook these considerations and suppose, as Mr Huxley does, that by the exercise of our abstract "free-will" we can create a "perfect ideal" (whatever it may mean) and impose it on the changing reality that is society is, in fact, to condemn freedom to the ultimate servitude—impotence. The society to which we belong, which has produced us and from which we have derived the impulse to change, can and will be changed; but only in so far as we understand and accept the necessities implicit in its organisation will the change be commensurate with our purpose and ideals.

## 2

Applying these considerations to the question of "ends" and "means", we must deny, first, that there

are any ideal, perfect or absolutely good ends or means. Mr Huxley's argument of course rests on a contrary assumption, but we know what it involves. It involves the persistent refusal to see the real ends which animate men and women, and hence to a failure to indicate the methods appropriate to their achievement. Indeed, by declining to recognise them at all and upholding ideal and ultimate ends, Mr Huxley has only succeeded, as we have seen, in associating himself, without seeming to be conscious of it, with some extremely real ends operative in contemporary society—the ends which correspond to the interests and aspirations of the ruling class. Should we not, therefore, frankly admit that all human ends are imperfect, "mixed goods"? Since, moreover, these imperfect and proximate ends represent the actual desires of real groups and classes of people, they involve, as is quite obvious to-day, a social conflict, and the achievement of any particular end or ends necessarily means the frustration of others. The pursuit of such ends inexorably raises the question of surrender or struggle. In the last analysis we must assert the end we believe to be desirable or renounce the wish to assert that end, and facilitate the assertion of an end we have deliberately repudiated. The tragedy is not that ends we believe to be good are pursued in some cases by means we know to be bad. The tragedy is that the alternative to asserting the end we believe to be desirable is, in crucial matters, the assertion of an end we believe equally firmly to be undesirable.

The fallacy of the distinction between a common, ideal end and a diversity of means, some ideal and some non-ideal—the fallacy which underlies Mr Huxley's argument—would be instantly obvious to us if we did not allow ourselves to be hypnotised by his literary reputation. What he takes to be a disagree-

ment as to means—between nationalists and imperialists, or socialists and non-socialists—is manifestly a disagreement as to ends and means. This truth is self-evident, and it would have been unnecessary to mention it but for Mr Huxley's refusal to concede it. Ends, moreover, must not be conceived as being external to means. They incorporate their own means. Anyone who makes a choice as between different ends makes a choice as well, if only in a passive way, of the means adapted to that end. The more specific and concrete and real and immediate the end, the more definitely are the means bound up with it. And conversely, the more remote, obscure, ill-defined and spiritual the end, the greater the disparity between it and the appropriate means and the greater the variety of means that may be suitable. The man who is thirsting after God can quench his thirst wheresoever and whosoever he may be. "All roads lead to God." But the man whose end is whisky, has, by the very adoption of that end, restricted, if only by negation, his choice of means. He cannot quench his thirst by prayer or meditation or by walking to a water-tap or bending over a pool. If, again, we want to travel to the moon, we can leave from any point of the earth's surface, but if we want to go to Paris, the places from which we can leave and the methods by which we can transport ourselves are strictly limited. In short, as we choose the end, we choose, simultaneously and necessarily, the means to that end—though this choice may involve nothing more specific than the exclusion of certain means. At whatever level the end may be, however rarefied and spiritual, this inescapable connection between ends and means subsists. If you want to blow your nose, there are only one or two ways of doing it. If you want to clear a field of weeds, there

are only one or two ways of doing it. If you want to expel an intruder from your house, the very statement of the aim defines the possible ways of its achievement. If you want to abolish private property or rid the world of militarism, which are not "ideal" but actual human ends, your choice is not between the acceptance or rejection of an ideal means, such as that recommended by Mr Huxley, but between a limited number of specific, non-ideal means.

Now in the case of ends or objectives of a certain kind, the ultimate action required by and implicit in it may be—as for instance where the end is to expel an intruder—a violent means and a non-violent means. Both may be adequate, and we must employ them simultaneously or successively, or renounce the end altogether. All social ends, all political and economic ends of immediate concern to us—emerging as they do in a class society based on subjection and exploitation—involve and incorporate violence. Hence we have only a specific and narrow choice. We may disown these ends, declare they are "evil" and not "intrinsically desirable", since their very formulation connotes violence; or we must form the grave and solemn resolution not to flinch from any demand that the end may make upon us. Even if we were to disown the end, we would in fact be conniving at the use of violence for ends we abhor. Our real choice is not between an abstract and ultimate "good" and an abstract and ultimate "evil", but between action with all its complex and far-reaching implications on the one hand, and on the other a complete and ignoble withdrawal from action—with all *its* consequences. We can resist evil, and by our resistance destroy and transform it; or we can recoil before evil and let it flourish. There is no middle way.



## 3

Struggling desperately to preserve itself in its decline, capitalist imperialism is to-day attacking every standard of life and culture that men have built up through the centuries. In the extreme, openly reactionary form of fascism it has erected falsehood and barbarity into a system. The world has become at once too small and too big for it: too small, because its ferocious and multiplying rivalries cannot be appeased without deluging the world in blood; too big, because it is incapable of feeding and employing the masses of the dispossessed—unless it be to send them to the shambles. Dreading this grim prospect, and striving not to be pushed into deeper poverty and destitution—hence ranged against imperialism with varying degrees of clarity and firmness of purpose—are the subject peoples of the colonies and the workers in the imperialist countries.

These are the stark facts of our time. Consciously or not, directly or indirectly, those of us who are not against this system and the oligarchy in control are *for* it. It is no doubt possible to imagine ourselves “neutral” and above the conflict, but what a price we pay for the delusion! Intellectually, we have to adopt philosophies such as the one we have analysed in the first part of this book—a philosophy based on a wilful blindness to reality, and teeming with inconsistencies, equivocations, “irrationalities” and evasions, both logical and of fact. In practice it means acquiescence in, if not active support of the policies and methods of our imperialist rulers—save for the formal and perfunctory opposition to re-armament. Least valid of all is the “ethical” case for this attitude, for it means the toleration of—or at best, the failure effectively to resist—the manifold oppressions and injustices upon



which the existing order rests. It means not righteousness or virtue but a passive compliance with evil, a "free hand" for war.

On intellectual, moral and practical grounds alike the conclusion is irresistible that there is but one course open to us—to take our stand, consciously and actively, with the socialist and working class and democratic forces engaged in the fight against imperialism in all its forms, fascist or otherwise. Our success of course would not lead to the establishment of Mr Huxley's Utopia; it would prevent the destruction of such values, moral and political, as still exist. And it would prepare the way for the construction of a society which would at the least be free from the monstrous iniquities of our civilisation. Knowingly and courageously to participate in this work is the worthiest ideal we can set ourselves.



## A NOTE ON BOOKS

THE limited number of references given below are only intended to carry the reader more deeply into the issues raised in the course of this book. There is a vast literature on nearly every one of them, and it would be impossible to present anything like a full bibliography.

On the subject of the origin of life perhaps the most recent scientific work is *The Origin of Life*, by A. I. Oparin, of the Biochemical Institute of the Soviet Academy of Science. It is now available in English. The theoretical problems implicit in the idea of development from the inorganic to the organic level are discussed by Prof. J. Needham in his Terry Lectures entitled *Order and Life*, while a more general discussion of this and allied themes will be found in *The Philosophical Basis of Biology*, by J. B. S. Haldane. A lucid survey of the whole subject, explaining the facts that may be regarded as definitely established, the problems that await solution and the lines along which a solution must be sought, is *Biology and Marxism*, by Prof. M. Prenant, of the Sorbonne. C. J. Warden's *The Evolution of Human Behaviour* contains an account of the transition from the anthropoidal to the human stage. For a more advanced treatment of the same subject, some chapters in *Human History*, by G. Elliot Smith, may be recommended. Specifically psychological issues are discussed in *The Biological Basis of Human Nature* (by H. S. Jennings), *The Psychology of Animals in Relation to Human Psychology* (by F. Alverdes) and *Contemporary Schools of Psychology* (by R. S. Woodworth). The titles of these books are sufficiently explanatory of their contents. It is a pity that H. Wallon's illuminating chapter on consciousness and behaviour in G. Dumas' *Nouveau Traite de Psychologie* has not yet been translated. The inter-relations between physical and mental processes are examined in detail in *Thought and the Brain*, by H. Pieron.

Prof. Ginsberg's volume on *Sociology* in the Home University Library is a brief introduction to the whole field of social studies. The problem of method in the social sciences is dealt with in an easy conversational style by C. A. Beard in *The Discussion of Human Affairs*. On social life in the animal world, the two most notable books are, I think, *Social Life Among the Insects*, by W. M. Wheeler, and S. Zuckerman's *Social Life of Monkeys and Apes*. An interesting account of the origin of civilisation and the different arts and crafts is contained in *Early Steps in Human Progress*, by Harold J. Peake, and in *Prehistoric Man*, by J. de Morgan, a fuller and more comprehensive work. In *The History of Social Development*, by F. Muller-Lyer, the main facts of social development are co-ordinated so as to provide a scheme within which to group, in their due significance, the elements of both primitive and historical civilisation. For a study of the concepts of society, institutions and associations, the best introduction is still MacIver's *Community*. Two books of outstanding importance by Graham Wallas must also be mentioned—*The Great Society* and *The Social Heritage*. Only those who have read

them can appreciate the secret of the wide influence they have exercised on post-war social discussions.

All the Marxist classics deal, in a sense, with the problem of social change. It would be impossible in this Note to refer to each of them separately, but as a starting-point I think Engels' *Anti-Duhring* cannot be bettered. It not only covers both the philosophical and historical aspects of the question, but is on the whole quite easy reading. A more specialised discussion of some of the issues will be found in Plekhanov's *Fundamental Problems of Marxism* and in *Essays on the Materialistic Conception of History*, by A. Labriola.

The new approach to the interpretation of cultural and scientific development is exemplified in a number of recent works of which we may single out for reference Prof. Laski's brilliant essay on *The Rise of European Liberalism*, and *Mathematics for the Million and Science for the Citizen*, by Prof. L. Hogben. The chapter on the theory of probability in Prof. Levy's *A Philosophy for the Modern Man* shows how even this abstract branch of mathematics has developed only under the stress of social and economic facts. A wholly original examination of the foundations of modern thought, as reflecting a change in the economic foundations of society, has been undertaken by Borkenau in his *Der Ubergang vom feudalen zum burgerlichen Weltbild*. The whole question of the inter-relations between social structure, psychological attitudes and beliefs and convictions is discussed at length in Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*. *Marxism and Modern Thought*, by Bukharin and others, contains a criticism of the main trends in contemporary theory, scientific and sociological; and *A la lumière du marxisme*, edited by Prof. H. Wallon, is a re-appraisal not only of the heritage of science, but of the problems which face our civilisation and the thinkers whose ideas are dominant in the Western world.

On the subject of imperialism, Lenin's *Imperialism* is of course the classic work. *Fascism and Social Revolution*, and *World Politics, 1918-1936*, by R. Palme Dutt, are two books in which Lenin's argument is brought up to date, while *The Crumbling of Empire*, by M. J. Bonn, is the latest statement of what may perhaps be described as the Liberal point of view.

A complete discussion of the philosophical issues raised in the course of this book will be found in *A Text-book of Marxist Philosophy*, by M. Sherokov and John Lewis, and in Prof. Levy's work mentioned above.

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